



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF THE FAIRFAX AREA

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Unit Handbook

Revised 2013

The Unit Handbook has been prepared in order to provide, in a consolidated format, all of the information necessary for unit officers to serve effectively.

Our Mission:

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase the public's understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

League Policies:

Partisan political matters should never be discussed at unit meetings.

Only to the extent that the public and its elected officials are convinced of the League's genuine nonpartisanship will the League be able to render effective voters service and gain a wide base of support for its positions on governmental issues. All LWV members are expected to keep their League activities and their political activities completely separate and distinct. For example, members may not distribute League materials at the same time as material for a candidate or party. At all League sponsored activities, League members should not distribute partisan information or petitions or display campaign buttons or insignia. It is the unit chair's responsibility to remind members and guests of this at the beginning of each unit meeting and to reinforce it as necessary.

A unit cannot speak or act on its own.

When the League speaks or acts, it does so through official channels only. If a unit feels that some local issue requires League action and it is an issue on which the League has a position and is able to act, the matter should be brought to the attention of the President who will advise them how to proceed. Of course, any member may express an opinion as an individual and is encouraged to do so. Neither a unit nor an individual may address a public official or write to a newspaper as an identified member of the League of Women Voters unless specifically authorized to do so by the Board.

Unit Organization

Unit officers may include: Unit Chair or Co-chairs, Membership, Action, Finance, and Voters Service Chairs. The unit officers are responsible for creating an atmosphere that fosters active participation by all members. Units should welcome guests and encourage them to become members. The enthusiasm, interest and personal concern of the unit officers will greatly contribute to the unit's success. Additionally, a Discussion Leader and a Recorder are needed at each meeting.

Each unit determines its own method of selecting unit officers. Some ask for volunteers; others depend on the Unit Chair to recruit new officers. Begin this process as soon as the request goes out in the spring. Should a unit officer resign, the unit should select another officer. Report all changes to Unit Coordinator.

Unit meetings are generally held the second week of the month, September through June. The Board sets the calendar for the coming year during the summer.

The Unit Chair receives a Monthly Letter from the Unit Coordinator with announcements from the Board. Questions and comments should be sent to the Unit Coordinator.

Unit Chair Responsibilities:

A. General Responsibilities

- 1) Schedule monthly meetings:
 - a) Arrange for a meeting location.
 - b) Appoint a Discussion Leader and a Recorder for each meeting.
 - c) Report the location and Discussion Leader's contact information to the Unit Coordinator at least two to three months in advance.
 - d) If it is necessary to change the meeting location or Discussion Leader after the information has been submitted, contact the Unit Coordinator as soon as possible.
- 2) Adopt a unit policy for emergency weather conditions.
- 3) Complete and submit monthly reports and forms as required.
- 4) Communicate with the Unit Coordinator as needed to obtain information, resolve problems, etc.
- 5) Encourage all unit members to participate in League activities.
- 6) Attend Fall Unit Kick-off event or send a unit representative.
- 7) Familiarize new League members with League structure, policies and procedures.
- 8) Evaluate the ability and potential leadership of members and encourage them to assume unit and/or Board officer positions.
- 9) Read communications from the League and disseminate information to unit members as needed.
- 10) Assume the responsibilities for any unfilled unit positions.

B. Conduct the Monthly Meeting

- 1) **Before the meeting**
 - a) Review the announcements contained in the Unit Chairs' Monthly Letter.
 - b) Read the *Fairfax VOTER*.
 - c) Review the program material and the discussion outline. Be prepared to assume the role of Discussion Leader if needed.

2) **During the meeting**

- a) Preside at unit meetings.
- b) Start the meeting on time.
- c) **Assure that the meeting is non-partisan.**
- d) Thank the hostess for the meeting accommodations, if appropriate.
- e) Conduct the business portion of the meeting.
- f) Share the announcements, requests for information and/or volunteers contained in the Unit Chairs' Monthly Letter.
- g) Encourage members to join program teams and committees and participate in all areas of the League.
- h) Select a Recorder to take notes during the discussion.
- i) Turn the meeting over to the Discussion Leader. Help facilitate the discussion as needed.
- j) Adjourn on time.

3) **After the meeting**

- a) Review the Recorder's report for accuracy.
- b) Assure that all unit reports and forms are submitted promptly.

C. **Unit Reports**

There are at least two reports that need to be completed after each meeting: a Unit Meeting Report and a Discussion Question report. These forms are found in the Unit Chairs' Monthly Letter that also contains all the information needed to effectively run the monthly meeting. The responses should be submitted to the Unit Coordinator as soon as possible.

1) **Unit Meeting Reports** Please complete the unit meeting report in its entirety. Especially important are providing:

- a) Future meeting locations and Discussion Leaders with contact information.
- b) Contact information for guests and prospective members (address, phone, email).
- c) Questions, comments, opinions and concerns for the Board.
- d) Responses to requests for volunteers.
- e) General program comments.

2) **Discussion Questions Report** Responses to the program discussion questions are vital to the Program Directors and the Board.

- a) Responses may be listed by question number.
- b) The range of group opinion should be stated.
- c) Suggestions and comments for future programs and/or action are invaluable.
- d) Responses should be submitted to the Unit Coordinator as soon as possible.
- e) ***It is critical to promptly send consensus or concurrence reports.***

Membership Chair Responsibilities:

- 1) Introduce and welcome new members and guests. Answer any questions they have.
- 2) Remind members to pay dues.
- 3) Encourage the recruitment of new members.
- 4) Forward contact information changes to the League Membership Chair.
- 5) Distribute a copy of the unit roster to each member.
- 6) Remind members and prospective members of unit meetings and arrange for carpools if needed.

Action Chair Responsibilities: Understand the difference between Action and Advocacy and be able to explain it to your unit members. (See Policies and Procedures)

- 1) Encourage members to follow-up on Action Alerts.
- 2) Encourage unit members to take **individual** action on League positions. Individual action (action taken in one's own name) is encouraged through writing, e-mailing, calling or contacting public officials.
- 3) Seek permission from the President or her designee if you wish to speak for the League.
- 4) Submit action proposed by the unit to the President for approval before taking action.
- 5) Encourage members to become observers/monitors at public meetings. Forward their names to the Board.

Finance Chair Responsibilities:

- 1) Organize a unit fundraising project to be completed during the League year.
- 2) Forward fundraising proceeds to the LWVFA office.
- 3) Encourage members to volunteer for LWVFA fundraising activities such as community/condo elections.
- 4) Identify organizations that might contribute to or sponsor fundraising activities and forward that information to the Board.

Voters Service Chair Responsibilities:

- 1) Develop and coordinate unit Voters Service activities.
- 2) Recruit volunteers in response to requests from the Voters Service Director.
- 3) Encourage members to serve as election officials.

Discussion Leader Responsibilities:

- 1) Review *A Guide for the Discussion Leader and Resource Person* at www.lwv-fairfax.org under the For Members tab.
- 2) Attend the monthly briefing usually held on the first Saturday of each month. See Fairfax VOTER for location.
- 3) Facilitate the unit discussion-- encourage members to participate and express their views; be a good listener.
- 4) Maintain a non-partisan tone.
- 5) Try not to answer the question or express personal opinions.
- 6) Remember the clock.
- 7) Be sure the questions are answered and the Recorder's notes accurately reflect the discussion.

Recorder Responsibilities:

- 1) Take notes during the discussion that will form the basis for the unit's report. Although notes should reflect the entire discussion, the report should focus on responses to the discussion questions. Other important comments and suggestions should be entered at the end of the report.
- 2) Confirm responses to consensus or concurrence questions.
- 3) Determine whether the Recorder or the unit chair will submit the unit's responses to the Unit Coordinator.
- 4) Submit the report promptly.