

League Women Voters: Best Practices

The national League board recognizes that fulfilling the requirements alone does not assure a smooth-running and viable League and that Leagues that employ certain practices that both enhance and supplement the requirements are usually the more successful Leagues.

The following is a listing of “best practices” as demonstrated by Leagues of different sizes and geographic locations. This is by no means a comprehensive list; rather, it is meant to be a way of sharing techniques for running a League successfully.

Best practices can be used in a variety of ways. You may want to read the list over yourself, mentally checking where your League is already successfully practicing some of these techniques or where your League might want to consider trying a new method of operation. A League board could use the list as a basis for discussion as it gets organized for the year ahead. In fact, a local best practices list could be developed as a guide for present and future boards.

In this listing of best practices, items 1 through 7 are the official requirements for Leagues as voted by the 1994 LWVUS Convention. Following each item is suggested implementation — the optimal level of operation.

1. **The League must have bylaws, the first three articles of which must be consistent with those of the LWVUS. The remaining articles must provide for democratic procedures. Best practices:** A League committee reviews the bylaws to check actual practice for conformity and to consider possible amendments prior to the annual meeting.
2. **The League must establish and maintain a nonpartisan policy. Best practices:** The League board reviews and discusses its nonpartisan policy annually at its first organizational meeting. At a minimum, board members who hold “sensitive” portfolios are not involved in partisan activities. Each League considers its own community and its political environment when stating specific allowed and prohibited activities. The board’s policy may be printed in the local League newsletter.
3. **The League must hold an annual business meeting of the membership. Best practices:** The League holds an annual business meeting of the membership to adopt a budget, bylaw changes, and local program and to elect officers and directors. In order to encourage member attendance and participation, there is a “special” aspect to this meeting — a speaker, an award to a member or community leader, and/or a time for attendees to socialize.
4. **The League must hold regular board meetings. Best practices:** The League holds regularly scheduled board meetings with written agendas and minutes distributed ahead of time. For better and more efficient

meetings, a timed agenda is used, which provides opportunities for developing plans, acting on committee recommendations and evaluating progress and results.

5. **The League must meet its financial obligations to the state and national levels of the League. Best practices:** The League budget provides (either through dues or fundraising) for the League's per member obligations to the state and national levels of the League, and payments are made promptly.
6. **The League must have a plan for membership growth and retention that encourages a membership as diverse as the community. Best practices:** The League develops and implements a written plan, with attainable goals and specific strategies, to increase its membership and to achieve diversity in members, leadership and program. Board members always carry membership information with them, ask others to join, and promote the League at every opportunity. The board adopts a board policy that affirms a commitment to diversity. The League plans outreach to a variety of groups in its community through networking, coalitions, joint projects, and other collaborative efforts. In order to promote retention of current members, the League provides a variety of opportunities for them to participate in deciding and carrying out League activities and goals. Annual renewal notices are sent out several months in advance; personal phone calls and other methods of contact are used to follow up with those who have not responded prior to the due date. Nationally recruited members (NRMs) receive a letter of welcome and are included on the bulletin mailing list. Well in advance of notice from the LWVUS that their membership is due to expire, the League invites NRMs to renew at the local level.
7. **Any advocacy pursued by the League must be consistent with League principles, positions and policies. Best practices:** The League sets priorities for timely action on local positions before taking action. The League responds to action alerts from other levels of the League and encourages grassroots member involvement in action where appropriate. The League president (or designee) is the official spokesperson for the League. The League has developed an understanding of the appropriate level of government at which action may be taken and, if in doubt, consults with the state or national League office. When appropriate, the League coordinates action with other affected Leagues. The League informs its members and the community of action taken through a variety of means (e.g., electronic media, newspaper articles, fact sheets).

Items 8 through 19 describe characteristics of healthy Leagues, followed by suggested guidelines for optimum practices that League boards may decide to adopt.

8. **The League sets priorities, develops plans and evaluates activities.**

Best practices: The board holds an organizational meeting after the annual meeting to plan the League calendar for the year ahead. Priorities are set so that the League can focus on a limited number of activities. Plans are developed that include an outline of activities and the board member/committee responsible for each. The board's responsibility includes an evaluation of each activity. Plans and evaluations are included in written reports submitted to the board for use in future planning.

9. **The League has a membership sufficient to maintain League viability. Best practices:** The League has a membership chair and committee that develop a plan each year to attract new members and to encourage their participation. League leaders are assigned specific new members to make contact with them and encourage their involvement. The president makes a welcoming phone call to each new member. New members are invited to a special program to orient them to the League's basic organizational structure, history, present activities and opportunities for member participation. The national League member database is updated regularly. A local membership file is updated regularly with information on members' special interests, achievements and League involvement; this file is shared with the nominating committee as positions need to be filled.
10. **The League holds regular membership meetings. Best practices:** Regularly scheduled meetings are held on issues of League concern or under study. These meetings are both informative and participatory for members. The League provides opportunities for members to interact socially as well.
11. **The League carries out citizen education/voters service activities. Best practices:** The League works to increase citizen participation in the election process on all levels by undertaking election-related voters service (e.g., registration drives, get-out-the-vote campaigns, election guides, candidate forums). The League undertakes citizen education efforts on issues of importance to the community, not necessarily ones on which the League has positions. This can take the form of holding public forums, distributing fact sheets or publications, running media campaigns, or organizing discussion groups. Such activities are often done in cooperation with other organizations.
12. **The League establishes positions on public policy through member participation and agreement. Best practices:** The League participates in study and consensus meetings on state and national program. When possible, Leagues share responsibility for study committee activity and consensus meetings with neighboring Leagues in order to lessen the workload on individual Leagues. The League has a plan for periodic review of its local program positions and updates its membership on these positions through meetings or newsletter articles.
13. **The League publishes a newsletter. Best practices:** The League has a method of regular communication with members. It distributes its

newsletter to appropriate community leaders and to prospective members. To facilitate a uniform image of the League, the newsletter is called The Voter and features the League logo. The League newsletter includes schedules of meetings, information on League positions, action alerts, and any other items necessary for a member to be informed and to act effectively; it avoids reprinting information from every-member League publications (e.g., state and national Voters). The newsletter contains a welcome to new members with a brief write-up on each one.

14. **The League practices sound fiscal management and adopts a budget. Best practices:** The League treasurer prepares written reports for the board at least quarterly and reports annually to the membership. The League has written policies regarding responsibilities for fiscal decision-making. League financial records are reviewed or audited annually. The League aggressively pursues fundraising income from members and the community. League budgets are set to provide adequately for the implementation of League program and activities. The League's budget committee recommends the adoption of a budget that reflects the League's priorities for the year and basic support for operating the League, including attendance at state and national conventions and financial support for the state and national Leagues.
15. **The League sends representatives to regional, state and national League meetings and to training opportunities. Best practices:** The League encourages all members, especially current and potential board members, to attend workshops, conferences, councils and conventions to increase skills and broaden knowledge to enhance the work of the League. Funds to cover at least a portion of delegate expenses are included in the budget.
16. **The League encourages flexibility of its administrative structure Best practices:** The League modifies its board structure, as needed. The League makes an effort to reduce time demands on board members, emphasizing the policy-making role of the board. The League schedules meetings to accommodate both the board and members' work schedules.
17. **The League submits reports to state and national Leagues as requested. Best practices:** The League president takes responsibility for completing report forms on time or requests the appropriate board member to do so, checking on the follow-through.
18. **The League has an active nominating committee. Best practices:** The committee is active throughout the year, working to ensure the vitality of the League by identifying the leadership potential of new and continuing members. The committee encourages board members to mentor and train upcoming leaders in order to build a leadership bank.
19. **The League has high visibility in the community. Best practices:** The communications chair is chosen for writing ability, energy and enthusiasm for the League and League activities. Conscientiousness, persistence and creativity will increase the League's visibility as media

responds to efforts to secure coverage in all forms of print and electronic communications, including calendar listings for programs and events. Media may include cable TV, community access and municipal TV stations, college TV and radio stations, trade association publications, bulletin boards and postings, neighborhood and minority newspapers and other communication vehicles important to the community. Photographs of League events accompany news articles and appear in the local papers whenever possible. League members not on the board are included in these photographs. Letters to the Editor are frequently used to inform the public of local, state or national League issues. All League news articles close with information on how to join the League and whom to contact for further information on the subject of the article. The League is listed in the local phone book, has an email address and a website, and has either an office or a post office box. The League's website is useful to members and the public, well-designed, easily navigable, well publicized, and updated regularly. Opportunities to link the League's website to allies, coalitions, cosponsors, partner organizations, media sites, and government (election/auditor) websites are explored in order to further the reach of the League and to make contacting the League easier and more convenient.