

League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad

Member Handbook



Mission

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government.

The League of Women Voters also influences public policy through education and advocacy.

League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad

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Nonpartisan Policy of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad

The purpose of the League of Women Voters is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government at all levels. The League of Women Voters is nonpartisan in that it does not support or oppose any political party or candidate; it is political in that it takes positions on selected governmental and other issues after study and consensus.

1. The League recognizes the role of political parties in government and believes that participation in the activities of parties is an essential ingredient of citizen responsibility. While the League urges its members to be politically active, certain constraints are necessary to maintain the nonpartisanship of the League as an organization. The board of directors of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad (LWVPT) has established the following guidelines. The LWVPT nominating committee shall talk with prospective board members about the implications of the League's nonpartisan policy. All members, including officers of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont triad are encouraged to participate fully in the political process as individuals without implying or receiving League endorsement.
2. Thus, they may participate in party activities, including precinct meetings and caucuses, and they may serve as precinct officers and delegates, but only as private citizens.
3. They may display yard signs, bumper stickers and the like, but they may not wear candidate buttons or insignia of any party or distribute partisan information at League meetings.
4. At any League-sponsored activity, including informal social events, members should not engage in partisan discussions or activities. In contrast, policy discussions are encouraged. Policy analysis and evaluation are intrinsically political but must remain nonpartisan.
5. Only a co-president or a member designated by a co-president may speak for the LWVPT. Letters and policy statements, press releases, speeches, etc., put forth in the name of the League shall be approved by the co-presidents in consultation (if needed) with the board of directors before release.
6. Members representing the League in the community should be sensitive to their responsibilities and fully aware of League positions. When acting as League representatives, members must not allow partisanship to be discernible.
7. Once the League (local, state, or national) takes a position on an issue, members may not identify themselves as League members while publicly expressing an opinion that is in opposition to a League position.
8. Members may serve on governmental commissions at their own discretion. If an appointment is League related, the appointee should be fully aware of the League's positions as they relate to the commission's responsibility. Representatives of the League must keep the board of directors informed and shall consult with the board before making any commitments for the League.
9. A board member shall not run for, or hold, any partisan elective office at any level of government. A board member may run for or hold a local nonpartisan elective office, after consultation with and approval by the LWVPT board.
10. A board member shall not indicate her/his political affiliations or candidate preferences at any level of government in the media, including on social networking sites or other public venues that also identify her/him as a member of the LWVPT board.
11. The political candidacy of a spouse, partner, or immediate relative of a board member shall be considered separate and distinct from the activities of the board member.
12. Members shall present questions about specific situations to the LWVPT co-presidents and/or board in cases where the foregoing policies do not resolve the question.

This policy shall be reviewed and amended or readopted by the LWVPT board at the beginning of each fiscal year at board orientation.

Approved September 24, 2012.

LWV Principles

The League of Women Voters of the United States was founded in 1920 by suffragists who had campaigned for the 19th amendment that recognized the right of women to vote. They recognized that the right to vote also carried with it the responsibility to become informed on candidates and issues.

The League of Women Voters believes in representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States. The League believes that all powers of the U.S. Government should be exercised within the constitutional framework of a balance among the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.

The League of Women Voters believes that democratic government depends upon informed and active participation in government and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings, and making public records accessible.

The League of Women Voters believes that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education that provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic or administrative discrimination.

The League of Women Voters believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people: that government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems that affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy and adopt domestic policies that facilitate the solution of international problems.

The League of Women Voters believes that cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems and that development of international organizations and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.

By Gretchen Knell, September 29, 2011

LWV Organization, Membership, Financing

League organization parallels the three levels of government: local, state, and national. Membership in a local League automatically confers membership at the state and national levels. That membership provides the opportunity to work on program issues at every level.

Any citizen over 18, male or female, may become a voting member of the League. Associate membership is available for younger people or noncitizens.

The League is financed through membership dues and contributions. Local dues are shared with state and national Leagues.

Democracy is not a spectator sport.

How the League Works

Member participation is central to the work of the LWV. Members choose issues for study at our League's annual meetings, which are usually held in May, and any member may attend. State and national conventions are also held.

During the study period members read about the issue, listen to speakers, participate in discussions, and sometimes tour facilities. After thorough study, members answer questions on the issue.

On the basis of answers received from members, the League board decides if a consensus has been reached. If so, a policy position is drawn up.

A League "position" is defined as: (1) a set of guidelines by which proposed government action can be measured; or (2) an expression of League goals against which proposed government action can be evaluated.

After defining a position, league boards study proposed legislation or regulations to plan action in support of that position. They decide whether to support or oppose proposed regulations for a specific issue. Or they decide whether to support or oppose proposed legislation that affects the issue. They also have the flexibility to work with others to achieve goals.

League action occurs at every level of government. Action can also be taken in support of our principles.

Only the board speaks officially for the League. However, members are also "called to action." They write letters to the editor or call/write their elected representatives. They speak for themselves but express support of the league's policy position and current action.

What is consensus?

Consensus is the process the league uses to reach member agreement on study issues. It is neither a simple majority nor unanimity; instead it is an overall sense of the group. In other words, it represents common ground and agreement in the members' answers to study questions. It can be called "collective opinion or concord."

Pursue your particular interests

Each member can pursue her or his particular interests by joining a Roundtable or by working on a project focused on those issues or interests. League members find deeper involvement and learning very satisfying.

Advocacy in support of league positions is also rewarding. The League of Women Voters is a multi-issue grassroots organization, not one that focuses on a special interest or a single issue. Rather, the League represents the public interest, speaking out on issues that affect us all — clean water and air, social justice, fair elections, international cooperation, public education, and health care.

Let our membership chair know of your special interests and how you would like to be involved and how you would like to participate. The League of Women Voters is for many of us our continuing education program. Get involved!

Roundtables

Each of the LWVPT's six roundtables focuses on and supports specific League positions.

League members and non-members join Roundtables that are of particular interest to them.

Roundtables examine pertinent local and state regulations, existing laws, and proposed laws to determine whether our community and state share goals and priorities similar to League positions. If not, strategies are developed to advance the League's positions by educating elected officials and the public. Roundtables contribute articles to the *Voter Impact*, speak to other organizations, collaborate with other like-minded non-partisan organizations, and write letters and/or editorials to local newspapers. These strategies lead to action as noted on page 6 .

If one or more of these six roundtables are of keen interest to you, please join that group!

The Fair Elections Roundtable (FER) believes the survival of our democracy requires two reforms that are fundamental to all others we seek as engaged citizens: (1) Ending gerrymandering through nonpartisan redistricting reform, and (2) improving methods of financing political campaigns. Accordingly, we are actively advocating for the NC General Assembly's approval of a nonpartisan redistricting process and a timely, transparent digital campaign finance reporting process and the restoration of public funding of NC election campaigns.

The Environment Roundtable supports the League's longest held positions on clean water and air and care for our environment. These include sensible land use and energy policies. The ERT visits one or more sites a year to observe care for the environment in operation. The ERT frequently hosts guest speakers addressing timely issues.

The Health Roundtable was the first roundtable and, for the last two years, has been primarily focused on educating the community about the Affordable Care Act. Specific attention has been given to Medicaid expansion and the exchange or health insurance marketplace.

The Immigration Roundtable is a comprehensive reform roundtable with broad membership from the League and from the wider community. Its programs have educated the community about many immigration issues. It supports comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship.

The Public Education Roundtable educates us about legislation and funding (or lack thereof) of public schools. The roundtable is concerned about the use of taxes to fund charter schools while reducing funding of public schools. Equal access to excellent public schools is a central goal of the League's position.

The Social Justice Roundtable is just being organized as a new Roundtable, so it is still under development.

Our Own League's Education and Advocacy

The work of the LWVPT involves both informing members and the public (education) and taking action to influence legislation at all levels of government (advocacy). Advocacy is based on policy positions formulated by the LWVUS, the LWVNC, and by our own LWVPT. We can use positions on any level to support action at the local level. (See summary statements of public policy positions that follow.) Specific programs and activities for education and advocacy are described below.

Lunch with the League

Lunch with the League meetings are held monthly from September through April. The Lunch is normally held on the third Tuesday of the month with the exception of December when there is not a Lunch. Occasionally there may be a change due to a speaker's schedule or weather. Lunch with the League is open to the public and is usually held in Greensboro at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, 607 N. Greene St.

Each of our six roundtables presents a lunch program. Guest speakers address issues specific to the Roundtable and League. Question and answer opportunities are provided and often the sponsoring roundtable challenges the membership to take specific action.

Voter impact, the League's newsletter, includes an invitation and description of each of the Lunch programs. The newsletter is sent via email to League members and to other organizations for distribution to their members.

Reservations are required and you may bring your own lunch or sign up for a provided buffet. The email addresses and/or phone number needed to make lunch reservations can be found in **Voter Impact** or on the League website (lwwpt.org). Payment for the buffet can be by check or PayPal or by cash at the door.

Voter Services

Voter service is an important part of the educational efforts of the League; it is aimed at members and the wider community. The League is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates or parties.

A candidate forum is generally held each election year at the September Lunch with the League program; however, additional forums may be sponsored by the LWVPT in conjunction with other non-partisan community organizations.

The LWVPT cooperates with Democracy North Carolina and the Greensboro Voter Alliance in developing a Voter Guide with nonpartisan information about voting, a schedule of candidate forums, and information about candidates running for office. The Voter Service Committee sends a questionnaire to each of the candidates; responses to the questions are included in the **Voter Guide** put out and distributed by the League.

The LWV is well known for its commitment to voter registration and its successful registration efforts. The LWVPT has a mission to register voters and protect everyone's right to vote. In addition to numerous community voter registration drives, the LWVPT has registered voters following every naturalization Ceremony in Greensboro.

Voter suppression is a current pressing concern of the League.

Taking Action

Advocacy can take many forms.

"Calls to action" are approved by the LWVPT board and/or co-presidents and are based on League positions.

Action calls, which include a summary of the issue as well as talking points, are sent to members and the public, asking recipients, as private individuals, to contact elected officials in support of the League's position as private individuals.

The League sometimes sends a letter or op-ed to the editor, signed by a member, who has been asked to write the letter on behalf of the League and is identified as a League Representative.

Other advocacy actions include visits with elected officials, press conferences, and more.

Civics Classes

Over the years, the LWVPT has sponsored "Know Your Government" civics classes that are open to the public.

Being part of the League of Women Voters is interesting and fun!

LWVUS Policy Positions - Summary

Protecting Voters

The League is dedicated to ensuring that all eligible voters – particularly those from traditionally underrepresented or underserved communities, including first-time voters, non-college youth, new citizens, and minorities, the elderly and low-income Americans – have the opportunity and the information to exercise their right to vote. The League supports uniform national voting guidelines.

Educating and Engaging Voters

The leaders you elect make the decisions that affect you – your job, health care, energy costs, security and more. The League helps you to get registered, get to know the candidates and issues, and get out and vote. The League supports the appointment of congressional districts and elective legislative bodies at all levels based substantially on population rather than partisan gerrymandering.

Reforming 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. We will continue this fight in Congress, with state legislatures, with the executive branch and, where appropriate, in the courts.

Defending the Environment

The League promotes the protection and wise management of our natural resources in the public's interest and encourages use of renewable resources. The League supports legislation that seeks to protect our country from the physical, economic and public health effects of climate change while also providing pathways to economic prosperity. The League promotes the understanding and participation of the public in decisions regarding the management of our natural resources.

Reforming Immigration

The United States is a nation of immigrants, and the League of Women Voters has a long history of encouraging their participation in American society. Immigrants have helped weave the fabric and identity of our nation, and we believe that it is critical for the U.S. to encourage their participation in our democracy. Our work around comprehensive immigration reform largely falls into the following categories: Working for a path to citizenship and helping immigrants become active participants in our democracy.

International Relations

The League supports working in cooperation with other nations and international organizations to promote peace and reduce the risk of war through arms control.

Advancing Health Care

The League is dedicated to ensuring access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans. We believe that all Americans should have access to a basic level of care, including disease prevention, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute long-term care, mental health care and health promotion and education. The League supports the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices. The League promotes the health and safety of citizens through limiting the accessibility and regulation of the ownership of handguns and semi-automatic weapons.

Social Policy

The League supports the Equal Rights Amendment and equal access to education, employment and housing. It supports equitable, quality, public education for all children K-12. Federal government programs should be supported through an equitable tax system that is progressive overall and has a role in providing mandatory, universal old-age, survivors, disability and health insurance. Accountability and the common good should be assured when considering transferring government services, programs and assets to the private sector. The League supports programs and policies that reduce poverty and promote self-sufficiency. The League is opposed to the death penalty.

Whatever the issue, the League believes that efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, clear assignment of responsibilities, adequate financing, coordination among levels of government, effective enforcement and well defined channels of citizen input and review.

Full statements on each national position can be found on the LWVUS.org website.

Public Policy Positions of the LWVNC

Representative government

Government should be open, accountable, ethical and responsive to its citizens. Along with encouraging citizen participation, the League works to ensure barriers to voting are eliminated and government operates in a fair and open manner. Voting rules should be consistent across the state and from county to county.

Social Policies

The foundation of our democracy rests in ensuring that every citizen has equal access to government services and opportunity. The League promotes social and economic justice, works to secure equal rights for all, and combats discrimination and poverty. The League advocates for the availability of child care, elder care and quality education for all students as well as fair and equal treatment of all citizens in the criminal justice system.

Natural Resources

By recognizing the interrelationships of air quality, energy, land use, waste management, and water resources, the League is able to work to promote an environment beneficial to life through the protection and wise management of natural resources in the public interest.

Fiscal Policies

How a democracy spends its resources determines what priorities are met and what issues are ignored. LWV works to ensure that our governments' fiscal policies are sound and that leaders at every level work to ensure programs are funded in a fair, reasonable, and responsible way through an equitable tax system.

Reproductive Choice

The State League's position is based upon National consensus and position, which reads, "Protect the constitutional right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices."

For more detailed discussion, visit the LWVNC website at http://lwwnc.org/about_action.html

Public Policy Positions of the LWVPT

Government

County government

Promote a working cooperation among the governmental units in our counties. Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, and responsive; that has a fair and adequate fiscal basis; that protects the individual liberties established by the constitution; and that assures opportunities for citizen participation in governmental decision-making.

Social policy

Meeting Basic Human Needs:

Health Care

Promote a healthy community that recognizes the importance of social, geographic, and political influences.

Promote a health care system for the Piedmont Triad that provides access to affordable, quality care for all residents, including prevention of disease, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute care, long-term care, and mental health care (including substance abuse treatment).

Promote control of health care costs, equitable distribution of services, efficient and economical delivery of care, advancement of medical research and technology, and a reasonable total expenditure level for health.

Criminal Justice

Incarceration and Alternatives to Jail

Promote construction of new incarceration facilities that are secure, safe, and with adequate space for medical care, family visitation, classes, exercise, and sufficient number of up-to-standard cells-ideally one person to a cell. Promote adequate and fair funding through a combination of sources, including county annual budgets and bonds. Promote alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent offenders, both for those awaiting trial and those who have been sentenced.

Programs that offer alternatives to incarceration must be well designed and appropriate and should meet criteria for measuring success.

Promote adequate funding of alternatives to incarceration through a variety of sources.

Child Care

Promote creation of day care centers at the parents' work places.

Promote appropriate level of education and qualifications, with adequate compensation, for care providers and staff.

Education

Support system-wide, clearly-defined educational goals and plans for achieving them.

Promote effective, accountable leadership, community-wide commitment to district goals, parental involvement in decision-making and adequate financing.

Goals should include a coordinated curriculum with appropriate grade-level expectations and standards in all subjects; thinking and problem solving skills should be integrated into the curriculum; the needs of each individual student should be met; and class size should be appropriate for age and activity.

Natural resources

Water

Promote measures that will maintain good water for human use, including:

- Control population density in the northwestern quadrant and adjacent to the water reservoirs of Greensboro.
- Encourage innovative building patterns, which allow the retention of open spaces and controlled buffer zones along the main tributaries and reservoirs.
- Use tax revenue for a continuous program of purchasing open space and controlled buffer zones along the main tributaries and reservoirs.
- Promote measures to reduce sedimentation and storm runoff.
- Conserve present water supplies by allowing water rates to reflect water costs.

Land use

Sign ordinances

Support sign ordinance measures for Guilford County.

Transportation

Promote development of modes of transportation that provide alternatives to the private automobile, such as a demand–response transportation system, improved bus and taxi programs, and encouragement of carpooling and bikeways.

Support continuation of a multi–modal transportation terminal in downtown Greensboro.

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Nonprofit organization

U.S. Postage Paid

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Funding the work of the LWVPT

Member dues and contributions are the main source of support for the LWVPT.

Dues

Dues are \$58 for an individual, \$87 for a two-member household, and \$29 for students. Dues are payable **July 1**. Members who join after **December 31** receive a credit for half of next year's dues. Members who join after **March 31** are considered to have paid for the entire year.

Here's what happens to those dues:

Local Leagues make a per member payment to the state organization and national League for large projects and organizational expenditures: for example, 1) LWVUS joined the amicus brief in King vs. Burwell. It was a key win at the Supreme Court on Health Care subsidies, and 2) LWVNC was co-plaintiff with the NAACP in seeking to overturn voting changes rushed into law by state lawmakers.

Our allocation to the LWVUS for each individual member, for 2015-2016, was \$32 and \$49 for each 2-member household; our allocation to the LWVNC was \$11 for each individual member and \$16.50 for each 2-member household. The LWVPT operates with \$15 of an individual member's dues and \$21.50 of the dues of a household.

Contributions

There are two kinds of contributions to the LWVPT: 1) nondeductible contributions are made to the LWVPT for operations and advocacy, and 2) tax deductible contributions are made to the 501(c) 3, LWVPT Education Fund, Inc., for its educational activities and nonpartisan voter service.

In addition, tax deductible contributions at the National level would go to the LWVUS Education Fund, also restricted to educational information on issues and voting, or, at the state level, to the NC Citizens Education Fund.

All members of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad are also members of the LWVPT Education Fund.

Fund raising versus Contributions

The LWVPT relies heavily on contributions, because we do almost no fund raising. For example, because it is an educational project, Lunch With The League is not designed to raise funds, but to only charge what we must pay for the cost of lunch itself, so that as many people can attend as possible.