

# League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad Members' 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.

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## What is the League of Women Voters?

The League of Women Voters was formed in 1920, just after the ratification of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote. Just like the U.S. government, it operates on the national, state and local levels. The goal of the League of Women Voters is to empower citizens to shape better communities.

The suffragettes, those women who worked so hard and for so long to earn the right to vote for women, realized, as with every other right or privilege, voting came with responsibilities. They knew it wasn't enough just to vote. People needed to learn how government works; they needed to learn about the issues and the candidates so each individual voter could choose the candidates whose positions align with their own.

So they formed the League of Women Voters, an organization dedicated to promoting political responsibility through informed and active participation in government.

The League is **nonpartisan** in that we do not support or oppose any candidates or political parties. Read LWVPT Nonpartisan Policy on page 8.

Over the years, the national and state Leagues and our local League have developed policy positions on a broad range of governmental issues after thorough study and member consensus. The studies and the resulting positions derive from the Principles, or concepts of government, to which the League subscribes. Review the League's policy positions using the links on page 10.

We are **political** in that we engage in advocacy based on these policy positions.

## How Do We Work?

Goals, or strategies for action, and the supporting League Principles and policy positions are called the League Program. The national and state Leagues adopt a program every two years at convention. LWVPT adopts a program every year at the annual meeting in May.

In addition to activities in support of our core work of voter registration and voter education, our League program includes goals for action and advocacy based on these local, state, and national policy positions.

Some examples of our advocacy are: calling, emailing, writing elected officials; attending meetings of City Council or Board of County Commissioners and speaking about an issue; letters to the editor; marching, demonstrating; attending and speaking at press conferences; and lobbying at the State legislature.

In addition to the action goals, any member may propose a study with the ultimate intention of developing and adopting a new policy position.

We invite members to submit present ideas for action, advocacy, or study for the coming year in preparation for the annual meeting in May. We encourage all members to do so at any time.

## **How Can You Participate in LWVPT Activities?**

### **Orientation Meetings**

We recommend that you attend an LWVPT Orientation meeting. These programs are a great opportunity to meet the leaders of LWVPT and other new members. You will hear information about:

- The history of the League, and the local, state, and national structure
- The mission and methods of the LWVPT, our nonpartisan policy, and the divided tax status that allow both for education and advocacy
- Voter Services and Candidate Forums
- The initiatives of the 6 LWVPT Roundtables: Environment, Fair Elections, Health, Immigration Reform, Public Education, and Social Justice.

Orientation meetings are generally held twice a year, in Spring and Fall. Watch your email for details!

Much of our work is accomplished through the Voter Services Committee and standing committees, or Roundtables, that study and advocate on important issues and collaborate with other non-partisan organizations on issues of mutual concern. Check out these groups by attending their meetings, and join the ones align with your interests. Most meet on a regular schedule. Meeting schedules are usually posted at [lvvpt.org/calendar](http://lvvpt.org/calendar). To email any of the committees, click [lvvpt.org/contact](http://lvvpt.org/contact).

## **Voter Education and Voter Registration**

To vote for candidates that will represent their interests, voters must register to vote and understand how the government works, what governmental and societal issues are facing us, and where candidates stand on the issues. Since the formation of the League, voter registration and voter education have been our fundamental objectives. The Voter Services Committee is the focus for these activities.

A candidate forum is generally held each election year at the September or October Lunch with the League program. LWWPT may sponsor additional forums in conjunction with other non-partisan community organizations.

The LWWPT cooperates with the *News & Record*, Democracy North Carolina and the Greensboro Voters Alliance in developing a printed Voter Guide and online Vote411.org with nonpartisan information about voting, a schedule of candidate forums, and answers to pertinent questions from the candidates running for office.

In addition to numerous community voter registration drives, the LWWPT has registered voters following every naturalization ceremony in Guilford County.

Member participation is central to successful voter registration and voter education. The following are some of the activities that require the work of many volunteers:

- Identifying and planning voter registration events
- Registering voters
- Developing questions for the candidates
- Communicating with candidates
- Planning and implementing candidate forum(s)
- Coordinating online voter guide
- Distributing printed voter guides

## Roundtables

The **Environment Roundtable** (ERT) 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, for example, recycling facility, water treatment plant, sewage treatment plant, and Guilford County farm, to observe care for the environment in operation. The ERT frequently hosts guest speakers addressing timely issues.

The **Fair Elections Roundtable** 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 **Health Roundtable** supports the League's position of promoting a health care system for North Carolina that provides access to a basic level of quality care for all residents, including behavioral health, and controls health care costs. To that end we seek to educate ourselves and the public concerning the realities of our health care system and where candidates for public office stand on health issues.

The **Immigration Roundtable** is a comprehensive reform roundtable with broad membership from the league and from the wider community, including those impacted by immigration policy. It supports just and humane immigration policy in the Triad, in North Carolina, in the United States and in our world as a whole. It presents educational programs to faith and community groups, conducts community-based research on how immigration laws impact immigrant and refugee lives, creates policy recommendations, speaks with legislators, and advocates for specific individuals in certain cases. Its work is heavily informed by immigrant-led and immigrant-serving organizations across the Triad.

The **Public Education Roundtable** believes that for quality education to exist and thrive locally for all children pre-K through 12, that these principles must be adhered to: funding equity, integration, high quality teachers and principals, support services to include teacher assistants and small class size especially in poverty schools and that public tax dollars must be used only for public school education with accountability and transparency required in all educational settings.

The **Social Justice Roundtable** (SJRT), formed in January of 2017, takes authority from LWV national policy, "Secure equal rights and equal opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans." The SJRT defines Social Justice as articulated by American political philosopher John Rawls: ". . . Whether something is just or unjust depends on whether it promotes or hinders equality of access to civil liberties, human rights, opportunities for healthy and fulfilling lives, as well as whether it allocates a fair share of benefits to the least advantaged members of society." SJRT members voted to make their first direct effort a study of aspects of Criminal Justice in Greensboro.

## What if I don't have that much time?

There are many other opportunities to participate in League activities. We ask that you take a [short survey](#) to indicate your interests so that we may invite you to participate in upcoming activities and events that align with your interests.

Below are 4 ongoing opportunities to engage with LWVPT.

### **Lunch with the League**

Lunch programs are normally held on the third Tuesday of the month (September – November, January – April). Occasionally there may a schedule change due to a speaker's schedule or weather. Lunch with the League is open to the public. Details are announced in Voter Impact, email invitations, and in local news media. Reservations are required and you may bring your own lunch or sign up for a provided buffet.

The Voter Service Committee hosts a candidate forum in September or October. Each of our six Roundtables presents a lunch program. Guest speakers address timely community issues specific to the Roundtable's area of interest. Question and answer opportunities are provided. Often the sponsoring Roundtable challenges the membership to take specific action.

*Watch your email for detailed announcements!*

### **Weekly Alerts**

Weekly emails describe League activities, events announced by partner organizations, and, when the need arises, calls to action.

### **Voter Impact**

***Voter impact***, LWVPT's monthly newsletter (September – November, January – April), contains the details of the upcoming Lunch with the League program, articles on LWVPT activities and issues, and updates from Roundtables and committees.

### **Annual Meeting**

At an evening meeting in mid-May, members select new Board members, approve the LWVPT Program and budget for the coming year and enjoy happy hour, dinner and entertainment. The *LWVPT Annual Report and Meeting Workbook* is sent to all members in mid-April to document accomplishments of the past year and to provide the information you will need in order to vote at the meeting.

## LWVPT Nonpartisan Policy

(Approved by the LWVPT BOD September 24, 2012; amended and approved August 1, 2016; amended and approved December 5, 2016; reapproved March 6, 2017; amended and approved Dec 5, 2017)

The purpose of the League of the Women Voters (League) is to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation in government at all levels. The League 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.

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 BOD of the League of Women Voters of the Piedmont Triad (LWVPT) has established the following guidelines. The LWVPT nominating committee shall talk with prospective BOD members about the implications of the League's nonpartisan policy.

1. The Co-presidents, Vice President, and the Voter Services Chair may not engage in partisan politics during their BOD term or sponsor fund raising for political purposes, host functions or distribute partisan material.
2. All other members of LWVPT, including other members of the BOD, are encouraged to participate fully in the political process as individuals without implying or receiving League endorsement. Thus, they may participate in party activities, including precinct meetings.
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. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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 BOD before release.
7. 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.
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 BOD informed and shall consult with the BOD before making any commitments for the League.
9. A BOD member shall not run for, or hold, any elective office at any level of government.
10. A BOD 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 BOD.
11. The political candidacy of a spouse, partner, or immediate relative of a BOD member shall be considered separate and distinct from the activities of the BOD member.
12. Members shall present questions about specific situations to the Co-presidents and the BOD in cases where the foregoing policies do not resolve the question.

## **LWV Organization, Membership, Financing**

Membership in LWVPT, our local League, automatically confers membership at the state and national levels. Any person 16 or over, male or female, may become a voting member of the League. Associate membership is available for others.

The League is financed mainly through membership dues and contributions. Dues are not tax-deductible. LWVPT has recently begun a fund-raising effort in order to provide higher profile informational events on current issues to a broader audience.

### **Dues**

Dues are payable July 1 for the fiscal year July 1 – June 30. Current dues amounts are stated in the drop-down menu at LWVPT web site [Membership Information](#). LWVPT and state and national Leagues have waived dues for full-time students through 2020. If you join during the last quarter of the fiscal year, that is, April, May, or June, your dues will cover the remainder of the current fiscal year and all of the following fiscal year.

LWVPT forwards to LWVUS a dues payment of \$32 for each individual member and \$49 for each 2-member household; and to LWVNC \$12 for each individual member and \$18.00 for each 2-member household. We retain \$20 for each individual member and \$29 for each 2-member household. In addition LWVPT pays \$1.97 to PayPal for each online dues transaction.

### **Contributions**

There are two kinds of contributions to the LWVPT: 1) non-tax-deductible 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 voter education.

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

## **Links to Important League Information**

Below you will find links to useful information. Take a few minutes to review the summaries of national League policy positions, and LWNVC and L WVPT policy positions. They are the basis of all League advocacy. Check out some of the back issues of Voter Impact to see what we have been up to. Find us on Facebook and Twitter to keep up to the minute!

If you are unable to access these documents or need to receive printed copies, email us at [membership@lwgpt.org](mailto:membership@lwgpt.org).

[Impact on Issues](#), the national League's policy positions

[LWNVC Policy Positions](#) (Scroll down for policy positions)

[L WVPT Policy Positions](#)

[Voter Impact Newsletters](#)

[L WVPT on Facebook](#)

[L WVPT on Twitter](#)

[L WVPT web site](#)

[L WVPT Bylaws](#)