

OBSERVER CORPS

EASY START GUIDE:

An observer is an individual who attends a governmental meeting, makes notes on what happens at that meeting and reports back to the League.

Steps for observing:

If the agency or board has a website, check it out for meeting schedules, agendas, and information about the members you will be observing. Try to get a copy of the agenda before the meeting.

Arrive at the meeting a little early and introduce yourself to the participants and the media if they're there. Assure the members that you are not there because something is wrong but to learn what is happening. Wear an LWV pin and bring something for taking notes

Remember that as an observer you're letting elected and appointed officials know that someone is watching what decisions are being made, and how they are being made. You don't have to be an expert on the state's open meeting requirements or take people to task for not being "open" but those actions should be part of your report.

Monitor both the issues being discussed as well as the process. Not everything will relate to a current League position, but will be of interest to the community.

Do not speak on the issues, either for yourself or, unless authorized to do so, on behalf of the League.

Prepare a short report for your League to use.

League use of an observer corps:

Observers can alert the League to issues in the community the League might want to study or develop a community forum about. (The Leadership Team might want to prioritize which meetings should be covered and send observers to certain local meetings where actions of interest are most likely to be happening.)

Observer reports can appear in the newsletter, be posted on the League website and can also be shared with non-LWV members.

For a specific, limited task to engage members, taking on going to the meetings of one community agency is both predictable and can be shared with someone else. Even if there are only a few local agencies or governmental bodies that can be covered, the program will benefit the League and the volunteers doing it.

If the meetings are televised, an observer could watch at home, submit a report about it and keep the League informed. This approach lacks the visibility of someone attending the meeting, but still helps to identify community issues. 5. Share the results of your observing with the public officials being observed.

Recruiting:

Ask members to participate and share the value of participating.

Create a template form they can use to do their reports.

Who was there?

How was the meeting conducted?

What issues were discussed?

What actions were taken?

Recognize the observers for their “sunshine” contribution. The third week in March is usually “Sunshine Week” focusing on open meetings and public access to government documents. The League has been a champion of openness in government and has supported efforts to expand open government requirements, local observers take these rules into action.

Have a meeting where observers can share their experiences and new observers can be recruited.

A more detailed publication on Observer Corps “Observing Your Government in Action” is available from the LWVUS website, www.lwv.org.