

BOARD STRUCTURE

A variety of job descriptions and listings of responsibilities as well as thoughts regarding mindset and best practices have been included for many potential board portfolios. It is important to note that local Leagues can and do operate under a wide array of board structures. It is not necessary to fill each of the following roles with one individual per role. Positions can certainly be combined, shared between more than one member or even eliminated in the case of more obscure positions in order to meet the needs of the local League given the availability of volunteer resources.

THE PRESIDENT AND THE JOB

JOB DESCRIPTION: PRESIDENT

OBJECTIVES: To oversee and coordinate the activities of the League and to ensure that the League continues to serve the best interests of the community and of its members.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Plan, coordinate, and preside at meetings of the board and at the annual meeting.
2. Identify and recruit members for League responsibilities.
3. Represent the League to the public, government officials, the media and other levels of the League.
4. With the assistance of the board, set policies and goals.
5. Serve as a catalyst to encourage activities which are in the best interests of the League.
6. Seek ways to cooperate with and use the expertise of individuals and groups to further the goals of the League.
7. Advise, assist, and encourage individual board members as needed. Supervise work of board members to ensure meeting of deadlines and competent performance.
8. Review and approve all major League publications before printing.
9. Serve as an ex officio member of all committees, except nominating committee.

ENTHUSIASM, TACT, PATIENCE and HUMOR are perhaps the four most valuable assets one can bring to the job of president of a local League. It helps to be well organized, get to the mail PROMPTLY, read it and have a plan for delegating what needs to be done. In the final analysis, the success of the League during a president's tenure will depend on the way the president handled the job and interacted with others, rather than on the excellence of the filing system. Remember to have fun!

Confidence and a genuine enthusiasm for the League's program will be reflected in the attitudes of the board and the membership. Let people know that their contributions are valuable and that their thoughts and ideas are needed. This will make it easier to enlist directors and committee members. Conversely, negative messages from the president will generate similar attitudes. Try to be as professional as possible. Expect excellence and work to get it.

It is natural that the president receives the acclaim for jobs well done by the League. Be sure to give praise, credit and encouragement to others wherever possible.

Together with the successes will come the inevitable mistakes. When the League is in error, be prepared to accept responsibility and rectify the error. This will add to your stature as a League leader and eliminate the kind of recriminations that help no one. Use the opportunity to guide the League toward the kind of constructive analysis that will avert future mistakes. Good board discussion of failures as well as successes leads to better planning.

Avoid the trap of making decisions alone or of doing the work for which someone else is responsible. The League will be stronger at the end of the president's term if everyone has shared in the responsibilities and satisfactions of the total League effort.

It has been found that a League works most effectively when its president* :

- is quick to help when things go wrong and praise when they go well.
- coordinates various activities of the League.
- is efficient as an administrator.
- understands the views and sentiments of the members.
- knows what she/he is doing.

Remember that the president is not alone. Neighboring Leagues are willing and eager to interact. The state League liaison or membership vice president is also there to help. When in doubt, call. Many local League presidents have discovered that, while the job seemed overwhelming at first, as time went by they found themselves developing greater resourcefulness, understanding, efficiency and assurance. It is a challenge during which leadership qualities emerge and there is a tremendous sense of personal growth.

COMMUNICATIONS

League Basics (In League): (LWVUS) is the basic reference for all League activities. Most questions will be answered there. For answers to additional questions, consult other League publications, liaison or membership vice president.

Presidents should receive files from their predecessors, including a job description and a list, by month, of the most important work/deadlines. If not, develop both the job description and the list immediately.

Determine the best method to contact board members. Make a list work/deadlines and distribute it to the board.

Develop a regular system for conferring with board members in order to make plans and to check on their implementation.

PLANNING THE BOARD MEETING

Careful planning is needed to avoid the board meeting that goes on indefinitely and fails to reach conclusions on matters that need immediate decision. As soon as the board meeting ends, start preparing an agenda for the next one. If the vice presidents are used in supervisory roles, consult with them about those portfolios under their supervision that need the most time; otherwise, confer with each director about the time she/he will need, as well as the nature of the discussion and the decisions necessary at this time. Every meeting should include a membership report and a treasurer's report, and the treasurer can estimate how much time at the board meeting needs to be spent on financial matters.

Some local Leagues use an executive committee to plan the agenda for the board meeting. However, this will add another meeting to your schedule and, if not careful, could turn into a mini-board meeting which is not advisable. Policy decisions should be made by the whole board.

Agree on the amount of time needed to complete the agenda, and prepare and distribute a timed agenda to board members ahead of the meeting, along with the minutes of the previous meeting. Much time can be saved if Board members circulate written reports (usually by e-mail) prior to the meeting, so that allocated time can be spent on discussion rather than on describing the content of the report.. Absentees should notify the president (or designated person) before the meeting, send written reports, and inform themselves of pertinent matters after the meeting.

*Survey Research Center, University of Michigan

The president acts as discussion leader, to keep discussion focused, not to intrude personal viewpoints. Simple parliamentary procedure is advisable for clarity and brevity. Keep a record of things to do and things which have been assigned to others. Start and end on time. Good minutes help everyone do a better job. Having someone review the draft before duplicating will minimize the need for corrections. Minutes should contain the board's decisions, who will do them, and when.

INTERACTION WITH THE PUBLIC

All statements and official letters should carry the name of the president and, if desired, the appropriate director.

All public statements should be checked with the president and, if there is anything questionable, cleared with the board.

All public meetings, communications and publications (including bulletins) should be approved by the president or a designee. Reports should be kept of all meetings and on interviews conducted.

PAPERS, PAPERS, PAPERS

Monitor all League communications and address personally or delegate to the appropriate person.

Maintain a record of all documents required for League and IRS compliance and keep everything that your League would need for its historic record. Save state and national League materials only as long as they are current or until they have been replaced by updated materials. Be sure that each board member also maintains appropriate files. Ask for, and keep year-end reports.

INTERACTION WITH THE STATE LEAGUE

Do not hesitate to call upon the members of the state board and our Albany staff for assistance in carrying out your responsibilities as president of a local League.

Members of the state board prepare reference materials for local League board members on a regular basis. This publication, called the *State Board Report* (SBR), is available in its entirety on the League website and is distributed to the local League presidents list serve five times a year. In addition, appropriate sections are distributed to other board members via the topical list serves. Additional hard copy subscriptions for other board members can be ordered (fee). Additional Presidents' mailings are distributed when needed.

The state League provides periodic area training meetings which all local League members may attend. Workshops on both program items and administrative areas are generally offered. Encourage your members to attend--the interaction with state board members and with other local League members sharing the same interests is stimulating and informative.

Participation at state and national League conventions and councils (state council is currently being done by mail) held in alternate years is restricted to delegates, although additional members are welcome and may attend as observers. It is important for your League to be represented at these meetings, and it is, therefore, essential to budget for travel, hotel, meals and registration fees for your delegates in your League budget. The knowledge and enthusiasm acquired by delegates is well worth the expense.

RESOURCES

- *League Basics (In League)* (LWVUS): An essential tool for League leaders. <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm>
- *Welcome to the League* (LWVNY): Contains general information about the League. <http://www.lwvny.org/localLeague/Welcome>
- *Impact on Issues* (LWVUS): The basic resource on national League positions. <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm>
- *Impact on Issues in New York State* (LWVNY): The basic resource on state League positions. <http://www.lwvny.org/advocacy/impact/impact.html>

- *In League in New York State* (LWVNYS): Contains job descriptions and policies for local League boards. See especially the section on local League use of tax-deductible funds. <http://www.lwvny.org/LLresources.html>
- *President's Packet* (LWVUS): Describes responsibilities of the president and the relationship between local and national League.
<http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm>
- *Simplified Parliamentary Procedures* (LWVUS): Useful for local League annual meeting, and by other groups.
<http://store.lwv.org/detail.aspx?ID=10>