

DIRECTING A LEAGUE STUDY

JOB DESCRIPTION: LOCAL PROGRAM STUDY DIRECTOR

OBJECTIVES: To direct study on a local League program. (Program directors dealing with state and national issues see page 5).

RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Form a resource committee.
2. Make a plan for the study to present to the board for approval.
3. Direct balanced committee research, pulling the information together and planning its use.
4. Inform members through bulletin articles, website, list serves and meetings.
5. Plan and conduct membership meetings to determine consensus.
6. Be aware of public relations opportunities and advise and assist public relations director as needed.

WHAT IS LOCAL PROGRAM?

Adopted at the local League annual meeting, local program consists of those board issues the membership support for action based on local positions and as well as new studies adopted.

Responsibility for choosing and adopting a local study, for conducting studies of local issues, for reaching positions on local issues (consensus) and for taking action to influence public policy in furtherance of those positions lies with the local League and its board.

Program and action gives the League visibility. It attracts new members. It increases respect and support for the League. An active local program is the single most important characteristic of a strong local League.

CHOOSING LOCAL STUDIES

The board recommends new studies but the decision is the members'. The higher the participation of the members in the process, the more "grassroots" involvement there is in all stages of program, from adoption to study to action.

A program planning meeting held 3-4 months before your annual meeting is the opportunity for members to push their program interests. (State or national program planning, as appropriate, can be considered in the same meeting.)

Where do study ideas come from?

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| - interests of individual members | - community |
| - program committees | - other Leagues |
| - board members | - observers at local government meetings |
| - previous studies | |

If you haven't had a new local study item for a while, consider holding a "focus group" to brainstorm with some community leaders, or meet with ordinary citizens to learn what's most on their mind.

Using this input, the board recommends a new study to the members through the bulletin in time to meet the bylaws requirements for notice. (Some Leagues year after year propose challenging new studies, or a restudy of a support position that is based on dated information, in order to attract new members.)

In proposing a new study, the board needs to consider:

- is government action needed?
- does the issue fall within League principles?
- is it a problem local government can solve?
- is the timing right?
- is there enough member interest?
- is effective citizen action foreseeable?

The wording of the issue should be general enough to allow some flexibility but to indicate as clearly as possible the issues' content and the scope of the work to be undertaken. It is often helpful to use the following format in presenting the proposed new study to the members:

Study of _____

Justification:

The problem; the current situation (law) (regulation); the change contemplated; who could effect change (the local government, agency, etc.)

Outlook for work:

What you are going to do and when.

At the annual meeting the members consider the proposed study. (In the mailing of the proposed program, including any new studies, many local League boards include information on non-recommended studies which can also be considered by the members provided bylaw provisions are followed.) At the meeting the wording of an item may be amended but the intent or scope of the study may not be changed.

Current local program issues the League wishes to retain must also be adopted at the annual meeting. It is recommended that Leagues include in their by-laws a provision to enable the adoption of emergency programs in addition to those approved at their annual meeting.

THE STUDY

Based on the study proposal and the discussion at annual meeting, the resource/program committee and the board agree on the outlook for work and a timetable for completing the study, on keeping the membership informed through bulletin, website, list serves, articles on membership meetings, the consensus process and deadline. The board appoints a chair to direct the study. The chair should preferably be a board member. (Otherwise communication puts too great a burden on the president.)

One of the reasons for the political effectiveness of the League is its reputation for thorough study. The committee must decide what, where and how to gather information. All sides of any issue should be explored. **Lack of bias is essential. The study material must include all sides of the issue both pro and con.**

Opportunities may surface to work with other groups. (See "Guidelines for Working with Coalitions" in this section.) Networking with other Leagues doing similar studies may be possible.

Keep the board informed. Ask the board for help and direction when you need it. Keep membership informed through articles in the bulletin and informative meetings.

PRESENTATION TO MEMBERS

As pointed out in *League Basics (In League)* (LWVUS), while the resource committee members will "often become expert on issues, they should remember that materials prepared for League members should focus on the information they need to make decision as informed citizens, not as experts or specialists in the field. Sometimes a bibliography, accompanied by a fact sheet with provocative questions, may be all that's needed."

Public meetings with a speaker and a workshop for in depth examination of an aspect of a topic may be held during the course of the study. But, depending on the size of the League, general membership meetings or discussion units are most suitable for achieving or reaching consensus.

Members need information in order to arrive at a position. It is up to the board to decide the approach and to approve the consensus questions. The questions should be carefully planned so that they will elicit responses that will serve as a basis for action and provide clear policy guidance from the membership without unduly restricting practical future action. Consensus questions should be distributed to the members in advance.

CONSENSUS

A discussion outline should be prepared. Some Leagues run unit meetings staffed by a coordinator, discussion leader and a recorder. In those Leagues the discussion leader would meet ahead of time with the resource committee to be briefed on the issue and to understand the meeting plan. Other Leagues have meetings, unit or general, conducted by the resource/program committee.

The members need to understand the process and the purpose of the meetings(s). Agreements reached during the meeting should be made clear. The board may decide to supplement the meeting(s) with a bulletin tear-off, telephone calls or other means to obtain greater participation.

After the meeting the committee should analyze member opinion and prepare a consensus statement for presentation to the board. The board determines whether consensus exists and approves the consensus statement. (See "Consensus" and "Concurrence" in this section.)

STATE AND NATIONAL PROGRAM/LOCAL PROGRAM

Study and action under state and national program are handled by a local League under the direction of the state and national Leagues.

Local Leagues may also undertake a local study under a state or national position. It would be handled in the same manner as a local study with two important differences:

1. There is no need for a formal program proposal and adoption at the annual meeting. However, discussion and agreement to undertake the study is appropriate at a general or annual meeting because the decision will require a major effort and membership involvement to do the study and to take action based on the results.
 2. When considering a local study on a state or national position, look carefully at the appropriate *Impact on Issues* (issued every two years by the state and national Leagues) for background on existing items. A local program position may not conflict with a state or national program position, and must fall within its parameters.
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Within these limitations, the study should proceed along the same lines as any local study. Assistance in planning and carrying out the study is available from both state and national directors.

RESOURCES

- *League Basics (In League)* (LWVUS): An essential tool for League leaders. <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm>
- *Impact on Issues: A Leader's Guide to National Program*: The basic resource on national League positions.
- *Successful Meetings*
<http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Presidents&CONTENTID=9775&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm>
- *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>