

# **GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A LOCAL LEAGUE STUDY**

## **I. DETERMINING THE STUDY SUBJECT**

Selection and development of a local programming study subject should address the following criteria:

- A. Subject should be of importance and general interest in the local community.
- B. Subject should not be a problem that requires state or national action.
- C. Subject should be addressed by governmental or institutional action
  - 1. through ordinance by city council or quorum court action or
  - 2. by a community institution by
    - a. publishing a booklet or pamphlet or
    - b. enacting a new policy or revising an old one.
- D. Subject should not be one which is already being solved by some other organization, but it could be a subject where the League's particular talents would be complimented through a cooperative effort with another group. When working with this group, care must be taken to see that the League positions are not assumed to be a total reflection of the cooperating organization. In particular, non-partisan standing is essential.

## **II. FORMATION OF STUDY COMMITTEE AND THEIR STUDY PREPARATION**

Establish a working committee with a chairperson and at least one board member acting as liaison to the full board. Evaluate the topic for broad participation by League membership or combined effort with a compatible group or organization. The following items will help begin the study process and should be assigned to a working committee:

- A. Develop a history on the subject with key players, contact names, timeline of events and current conditions.
- B. Monitor public meetings or activities that have a bearing on the issue and report these happenings to the committee.
- C. Collect related news stories and magazine articles. Search the Internet for reports by authorities on the subject.
- D. Include differing opinions or points of view.
- E. Define the key problems and what authority has the responsibility or power to improve the situation.
- F. Determine how similar problems are resolved and find model programs, policies or ordinances that are successful.

## **III. STUDY DESIGN**

The purpose of the study is to educate sufficiently for individuals to have enough depth of understanding of a subject to take an organized, informed position that is useful in advancing an idea, solving a problem or addressing authority. Different models are possible

and depend on the subject, time available, number of participants and financial commitment as to how the study proceeds.

#### A. Study Guide

1. Develop at minimum a summary report of materials collected during the study preparation that broadly covers the subject and offers references for those wishing to research at greater depths. For complex subjects, divide the preparation between several individuals to make the task manageable. A multi-sectioned notebook may be needed for this.
2. Provide the study guide to the membership as preparation for introductory discussion. If posted only on a web page, a copy should be made available at the public library for those who do not have computer access.
3. Conduct one or a series of membership discussions with a knowledgeable member or invited individual to facilitate. See that all issues in the study guide are addressed. Write a short report of the discussion. If several discussions are held, combine reports into one summary.
4. The study committee should develop a set of consensus statements from the final summary report.
5. Distribute consensus statements among the membership prior to conducting a consensus activity.
6. Conduct a consensus activity that is preceded by a general review of the study for the benefit of those who may have only participated in part. Discuss consensus statements and arrive at unified positions.
7. Report consensus positions to the membership and record it in the group's "Where We Stand" document. Maintain a copy of the full study in permanent records for future reference.
8. Make consensus positions public to the media and in ways that help the public and officials become aware of important information.

#### B. Forums and Panels

If the study committee does not prepare a study guide, a series of speakers representing the breadth of points of view or experience on an issue may be invited to speak. Care must be made to allow adequate time to cover the topic. If necessary, it should be broken into a series with a brief report made after each. Combine these reports, if more than one meeting takes place, for distribution to the membership. Proceed with steps 3 through 7 as above.

#### C. Combined Guide and Forum

The study process can benefit from a combination of internal LWV research (Study Guide Design) and outside speakers (Forum and Panel Design). Materials may be simple or elaborate. Public education can be simply done or expensive if printing or advertising is used.

A League of Women Voters study should bring interest and enthusiasm to a group. It can have a unifying value if progress in addressing a problem gains public support. But it can also be divisive if people do not feel they have been represented in the discussion or that a few are able to overly influence the group. There is a great deal of work in doing a study well, but it is one of the best ways to address the LWV mission. Only through applying extra effort to learn more about a subject should a League feel qualified to voice an opinion.