

## GUIDANCE FOR MAINTAINING NONPARTISANSHIP

Nonpartisanship is the underpinning for the League's highly regarded and highly valued reputation as a source of accurate and unbiased information on governmental issues and elections. Nonpartisan means that the League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

In addition to the importance of maintaining nonpartisanship, Leagues must distinguish between advocacy and voter service. Voter service focuses on education for election information, such as ballot access (voter registration), voter guides and candidate forums.

League advocacy involves educating members and the public in support of or opposition to specific measures and seeks to influence the opinion of others.

The following guidelines are offered to assist in making judgments to safeguard the League's nonpartisanship and public trust.

### A. Voter Service

1. Candidate Forum Questions. Pose questions in a neutral way without reference to the League's position. Questions should be framed to give candidates an opportunity to explain their positions rather than to elicit a yes or no response. For example, there is a vast difference between asking,

"The League of Women Voters supports a campaign finance reform, do you?" versus "What changes, if any, would you recommend in regard to Illinois' current campaign contributions disclosure laws?" The public could infer League support for or opposition to a candidate based on the response to the first question. The second question does not state the League position and gives the candidate an opportunity to make substantive policy points.

2. Providing Voter Service Information. Voter service may not describe League positions and may not advocate for or against specific legislation or ballot issues. For example:

- a. LWVIL positions should not be distributed or promoted in a voter guide.
- b. A handout that objectively presents pros and cons on a ballot issue would be appropriate.

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**B. Ballot Propositions**

If your League has a position on a particular ballot question, you should be in an advocacy mode. It would be appropriate in such cases to hold a separate meeting on the ballot proposal where the League would present its position.

**C. Advocacy and Lobbying Activities**

Advocacy activities can continue during election season as long as they are distinct from voter service activities. For example, it is appropriate for the League to sponsor a program on campaign finance reform or advocate for measures to protect women's access to reproductive health care at a program or general meeting that is not related to voter service.

**Preventing Public Confusion**

The League's role as a nonpartisan advocate can result in public confusion, particularly when the League is active on a controversial issue or is actively promoting an issue, which is the position of a candidate/party. If someone challenges the League's nonpartisanship, use the following statement as appropriate.

“The League of Women Voters is nonpartisan and neither supports nor opposes candidates for elected office but does work to influence public policy on specific issues after member study and consensus.”

Document History

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