

ADOPTING A NEW STUDY DEVELOPING A NEW POSITION HOW A LOCAL LEAGUE REACHES CONSENSUS

The term “consensus” means the sense of a group’s thinking. In the LWV it has come to have a specialized meaning, describing a League process for reaching member agreement. Consensus in the League is a qualitative interpretive process, not a quantitative tally of yes and no. It does not require unanimity – it would be amazing if any group could agree 100% on anything. But it does indicate that a substantial number of League members found areas of agreement on an issue they have studied.

Consensus is the result of a process which begins when League members adopt a study item at an annual meeting or biennial convention. A resource committee is named who studies the subject, often presents programs, and generally, provides unbiased information to the membership. The study period may last for 1-2 years as stipulated on the original proposal. Near the end of that period the Committee suggests to the Board possible consensus questions. The wording of these questions is very important; they must be as objective and unbiased as possible, not building in any preconceptions. Consensus questions on local program are approved by the local board, state, and national studies by the appropriate committees. Often the questions are presented to the membership before the consensus meeting through state, local or national bulletins.

At the consensus meeting the committee is assisted by a discussion leader and a recorder. Complete notes are taken, including attendance data. The group, under the leadership of the discussion leader, forms its answers to the questions. What emerges is the shared point of view. The recorder should note when there is strong agreement on an issue or if there is a significant dissent on some aspect and should attempt to isolate the controversial aspects.

At the next meeting of the Board, while the consensus is still fresh in mind, the resource committee chair presents a proposed consensus formulated by the committee. The Board evaluates the consensus report, considering minority as well as majority views. If the Board finds that there has been substantial agreement among members, then the League has reached a position on a given issue. The statement of position is carefully worded, for it will be the basis of League action, perhaps for many years. It is promptly reported to members, usually in the local bulletin. League members who do not agree with the position are free to speak against it as individual citizens, but not on behalf of the League.

1. WHAT IS CONSENSUS IN THE LEAGUE?

Consensus in the League means agreement among a substantial number of members, representative of the membership, reached after sustained study and group discussion. It is not just a simple majority nor necessarily unanimity.

2. HOW DO YOU ARRIVE AT CONSENSUS IN THE LEAGUE?

Consensus within a group which is meeting together for discussion in “the sense of the meeting.” It comes after careful study of the facts and free discussion in which the expression of all points of view has been encouraged and the view of the minority considered along with those of the majority. It should be summarized at the end of the meeting or point by point as each point is considered so that the group itself may decide whether its thinking has been accurately assessed. Consensus evolves from informed discussion and deliberation. It is a meeting of the minds. It allows for variations and shades of opinion on many aspects of a given issue. The strength of consensus depends upon the depth of understanding of the subject, the strength of agreement among those who participate, and the proportion of members who participate.

When the body of opinion expressed in consensus has been put in words by the appropriate Board, it is called a position.

3. WHAT ABOUT THE MEMBER WHO DISAGREES WITH THE STAND OF THE ORGANIZATION?

They are, of course, free to act in opposition to the position of the organization provided they do so as an individual and do not identify themselves with LWV. The role of the minority in the League is most interesting. It is a position of honor and respect.

CONCURRENCE

Concurrence is the act of agreeing with – or concurring with – a statement or position. A decision-making technique used by the League for some time, concurrence can work in several ways. Groups of League members or League boards can concur with (1) recommendations of a resource committee or study group; (2) decision statements formulated by League boards; or (3) positions reached by another League or Leagues.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER PRIOR TO ADOPTING A STUDY

1. Timing
 - a. Is this the time for it?
 - b. Is it a long- or short-term project?
2. Political Climate:
 - a. Is the government giving this problem/issue priority?
 - b. Should it be given higher priority?
 - c. What action can be taken?

3. Community Awareness and Attitude:
 - a. How aware is the community of the issue?
 - b. How aware can the League make the community?
 - c. What is the community attitude toward the issue?
4. League Members:
 - a. Do we have the time and people to work on this?
 - b. Where does it fit with our other goals and priorities?
 - c. Can we be effective?
5. Allies:
 - a. Who else is doing something about this?
 - b. Who could we join with?
 - c. If we don't take it on, who will?
6. Controversy:
 - a. How controversial is the issue?
 - b. Are we willing and able to deal with controversy?
7. Cost:
 - a. What will the study cost?
 - b. Do we have enough money in the budget?
 - c. What sources can provide extra funding needed?
8. Public Relations:
 - a. What will this do to our prestige, effectiveness in the community?
 - b. Can we get coverage:

Adapted from LWVUS



Guidelines for
League Studies.pdf

Prepared for LWV Johnson County
July 2022

Paulette Vandegriff
LWVIN
2nd Vice President