



Guide to Effective Studies

League of Women Voters of Washington

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Introduction

This *Guide* is a tool for creating League studies that are well-researched, non-biased and informative. It is written to help study committees and board members keep track of their multiple tasks and responsibilities and, it is hoped, make their work easier.

Key Principles – ABC’s

ABC’s of a League Study

Material contained in a League study must be:

- Accurate,
- Balanced, (objective and unbiased)
- Credited (show your source).

The first two are essential to the integrity of the document, and the third to demonstrating that integrity.

Key Players (duties are fully described in applicable steps in the study process):

- **Board:** Final authority for study content rests with the board, which reviews the final draft as an interested outsider and bases its judgement on completeness, absence of bias and whether the publication is within the scope adopted at convention or annual meeting.
 - **President appoints Study Committee Chair and Members**
 - **Approves study outline and major changes:** See pages 3, 4
 - **Appoints Reading Committee:** See pages 9-11 for full description
 - **Resolves Conflicts:** See pages 9-11 for full description
 - **Approves & Publishes Study:** See pages 11-13 for full description
 - **Evaluates Consensus:** See page 13-15 for full description.
- **Committee Chair:** page 4, 7, 9, 11, 13
- **Study Committee:** page 4, 7, 13
- **Board Liaison:** page 4, 7
- **Editor:** page 10
- **Formatting Editor:** page 11, 12
- **Staff:** page 12

Key Points of the Study Process

It is important to remember that the study process is a cooperative effort between the board and the study committee. It is the board's responsibility to monitor the entire process to ensure that the membership is able to develop member understanding and respond to the consensus questions in an unbiased and nonpartisan atmosphere.

1 - Preliminary Steps – Adoption of Study Item

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

A study item is chosen according to bylaws with a Title, Focus and Outlook for Work.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities:

A. LWV members: suggest study ideas through the Program Planning process; voting members/delegates to State Convention/Local Annual Meeting adopt the study item. It is the responsibility of members proposing study ideas to be sure that the topic being proposed is something that government can appropriately address at the level of the League suggesting the idea.

B. LWV Board: Reviews local League input as described in the program planning process and recommends potential studies that are considered at Convention, oversees the adoption of the study item and the study process as outlined in this *Guide*.

III. How the process works:

A. Suggestions are developed through Program Planning process.

B. Study resulting from this process is adopted at Annual Meeting (Local League) or Convention (State League) with a refined scope and focus.

C. Adopted study is referred to a study committee with responsibilities as defined in this *Guide*. The chair and committee are appointed by the President.

D. The study committee then adopts an outline that is approved by the full Board

IV. Key considerations:

The League of Women Voters has a tradition of issue study that leads to advocacy for that issue. The League process for study has long been recognized for its excellence. The foundation for League action includes the study of the issue in an unbiased manner, discussion of the resulting report among members, the consensus of members on the issue based on their discussion and the resulting adoption of positions arising from that consensus.

2 - Study Committee Formation & Planning

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

Once formed, the study committee agrees on a plan of study, which will include an outline of the areas to be covered and questions to be asked, and a plan of work, which will include an agenda for the committee and a timetable. The committee may narrow, but not expand, the scope of the study as adopted by the annual meeting/convention delegates. The board liaison will present the plan and any major changes to the board for approval and comment.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities:

A. LWV President: appoints study committee chair; study committee members, and identifies board liaison to the study committee.

B. Study Committee Chair (must be a person who can be objective and provide balance, without promoting a personal viewpoint on the issue.):

- Provides notice of committee meetings and activities to committee members and LWV board members.
- Discusses budget needs and limitations with liaison.
- Ensures that committee meetings are held on a regular basis and conducted in an objective and unbiased manner in an environment which fosters discussion among equals without fear of personal attack.
- Keeps committee members who are unable to attend the meetings informed as to scheduling of interviews, resources, notes taken during interviews, and lists of reading materials.
- Ensures that the study is reviewed for technical accuracy by outside objective and unbiased sources and/or members with special expertise in the area. Technical review should not be done by the sources for the report's original information.
- Cooperates with the reading committee to see that all required changes are made.

C. Study Committee: Invitation to the study committee shall be broadcast to all members. Few may take advantage of the offer, but all members should be invited to join. Invite participation in a variety of ways. Committee membership shall represent more than one point of view. Avoid having only members with one strong viewpoint serve as the committee. The committee is largely self-selecting, often with members who promoted the adoption of the study as a program item, so special care should be taken to bring a variety of viewpoints to the committee. The committee shall have a board liaison assigned to it by the President.

D. Board Liaison: A board member who is knowledgeable about League study process shall serve as liaison between the board and the study committee. The liaison:

- Attends all committee meetings.

- Provides information to the committee about available staff support and budgetary issues.
- Distributes this *Guide* to the committee members and discusses its contents early in the process.
- Presents (with the committee chair, if possible) the plan of study, budget expectations and timeline developed by the committee to the board for approval.
- Reports any changes in the plan of study to the board for approval.
- Reports regularly to the board on committee progress and any problems of the study committee.
- Presents (with the study chair) proposed consensus questions that have been reviewed by the reading committee to the board for comment and approval.
- Performs other functions as requested by the president or the board, or the committee.

III. How the process works:

At its initial meeting, the committee begins work by following essential steps to refine the scope of what was adopted at convention by the membership and develop a work plan and budget for the committee:

A. Begin with a clear agreement by the group on:

- What primary questions need to be answered?
- What issues/facts relevant to the subject should be anticipated/studied so a range of conclusions is possible?
- What are the criteria for a course of committee action, such as: does it meet limitations of time, finances, expertise of committee/community resources?
- Is the information being gathered critical to the scope of the study?

B. Establish a work plan:

- Agree on a plan of study, and development of a timeline.
- Develop a study outline, and if desired, have the preliminary plan be reviewed by a technical expert to be sure that all components of the issue are included. Plan must be approved by LWVWA Board.
- Decide how and when committee meetings, research and writing will occur. Often, various committee members write sections of the study on which they have the most interest or expertise, then present the draft sections to the committee.
- Assign research and writing tasks
- Consider and decide on various means of investigation, such as tours, speakers, and written materials.
- Set schedules for evaluating the progress of investigation and the effectiveness of the committee process (in addition to the regular committee meetings).

C. Timeline: it is critical to remember that the consensus (member agreement) report for a two-year study needs to be presented to the board by March, just 1 ½ years from the time the study item is selected at the convention. **Timeline Template is in Appendix A, page 16.**

D. Plan a budget for Study Committee work

- **Budgetary Considerations:** Early in the process, the committee should identify the time, money and resources needed to complete the study, and work with the liaison and the board to ensure their availability.
- **Office Support:** Any expected use of office staff or equipment must be discussed and planned with the president. As a general rule, typing (or word processing) will be done by the study committee, or a person of their choice.
- **Funding Request to Education Fund -** League studies are education projects and are funded by Education Funds. After a study has been adopted at Annual Meeting/Convention it is necessary for the committee to develop a study preparation budget and submit it to the Education Fund board for approval and funding. For funds held by LWVWA EF, the correct form – "Project Approval Request Form" – is in *Your Education Fund, a Handbook for Local Leagues*, available on the state League website (<http://www.lwvwa.org>).

For state studies, the Education Fund budget allocates a specific amount for studies, therefore all studies selected at the convention must fit into that set amount. Alternatively the study committees may work with the Education Board to raise additional money from outside sources.

After the committee's project budget has received approval by the Education Fund Board, the committee chair will submit receipts and/or bills to the Education Fund treasurer for reimbursement or payment to the Education Fund treasurer.

IV. Key considerations:

- A. Work Plan** needs to include review of criteria in the Research / Writing section (see pages 7-8) to ensure accurate and unbiased research and writing.
- B. Review Timeline:** need to be sure to hit time bench marks to complete study in the two-year time frame.
- C. Committee budget** is for the expenses to prepare the study; the budget that is required for the committee to do its work.

3 - Committee Produces Study

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

Using guidelines for research/interviews and writing, the study committee produces an integrated draft of study to submit for review.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities:

A. Study Committee Chair: Supervises production of the study – makes writing assignments, works with the editor, the president and liaison, communicates with all committee members, etc., considers people to later provide technical review. Ensures that Executive Summary (no more than two pages is prepared). Ensures that draft consensus questions are prepared.

B. Study Committee: Members participate in committee meetings as called; complete research and writing tasks; write assigned sections of the study as part of the integrated draft submitted by the committee.

C. Board Liaison: Monitors work as necessary; is available for consultation.

III. How the process works:

A. Committee Meetings: The committee and board liaison should meet regularly, in addition to communication by fax, email, and mail, to discuss and review the status of the study, findings, issues that arise and changes to the plan of study and timetable. Meetings may also be conducted electronically (“Go To Meeting” is an example of that technology). Meetings may include speakers from a variety of perspectives, tours or other activities.

B. The research and study process: Resource Materials: The committee as a whole is responsible for pulling information together and planning its use. The committee should examine all sides of an issue so that the information presented to members will be balanced, objective and unbiased. Members and other readers need the facts, the issues, and the options for addressing the problem, with the pros and cons. The common base of knowledge includes exposure to a variety of perspectives to avoid bias and lead to balanced consensus discussion for members.

The committee may:

- Build on existing resources, such as government studies, reports and legislative or executive solutions to a particular issue, or information prepared by other sources, supplementing the material as necessary to ensure an objective, and balanced publication;
- Adapt and supplement materials developed by other state or local Leagues;
- Perform original research; and/or

- Develop a questionnaire and conduct interviews with community experts to gather information. The questions may vary greatly depending upon the purpose of the interview.

The Committee must: Provide information on proper citation of all source materials, including quotation marks when directly quoting, and footnotes or endnotes to cite all sources.

- An easy guide can be found at: http://www.sciencebuddies.org/science-fair-projects/project_mla_format_examples.shtml. Also available: The Harvard Kennedy School has a list of Style and Citation Guides at www.hks.harvard.edu.
- Internet sources
 - Website references need to include: the owner of the website and the web address (complete url), the author's name and a date. The date may be the year the article was written, or the last day the web site was updated. If this information about the reference is not available, it is probably not a reliable site.
 - Include the date the site was accessed.
 - Use Wikipedia with caution – it can be useful in gaining some basic knowledge. Since it allows any user to edit the information, be sure to cross check information with an original source.
- When citing an expert in a personal interview or communication, the person's name, job title, and company must be listed with date of contact.

C. Writing

- Various committee members write sections of the study, then present the draft sections to the committee to create the integrated draft document, not a series of separate “white papers.” It is important to have a single voice style and parallel format structure. (Aid: *Elements of Style*, Strunk & White)
- Photos, graphs, etc must be high quality/resolution images from the source. Each subsequent copy of the original further reduces quality and clarity of image. Each photo or graph used in the study needs to be credited.
- Content Requirements: studies funded with Education Funds must comply with IRS regulations governing 501(c)(3) organizations. Specifically:
 - The study must be educational in nature and prepared in an objective and nonpartisan manner without advocating a particular position on an issue;
 - The study must be designed to serve the general public, not League members exclusively; and
 - The study and resources cannot be used to promote League membership.

D. Draft consensus questions that are non-leading and unbiased and ensure that information for informed consensus can be found in the study document.

IV. Key considerations:

While the Study Committee's primary function is to prepare the study document, there are additional opportunities for the Study Committee:

- A. Activities:** In the course of its research, the committee may discover additional opportunities for speakers, field trips, outreach, publicity, etc. The committee may create a list of additional ideas to be available for members' usage. Supplementing the written document allows for different learning styles. The committee may also compile a list of those entities they think might find the study useful.
- B. Funding:** In the course of its research, the committee may discover opportunities for grants or corporate funding sources. The committee should refer those ideas to the board liaison, who will take those ideas to the board for consideration and for the development committee to pursue.
- C. Continuing Responsibilities:** The committee may continue as an action committee after consensus has been reached. At that time, any proposals for action must be coordinated through the League portfolio chair, the action chair or the board. The committee is open to new members at any time.

4 - Review and Revision

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

Each study (including Executive Summary and Bibliography) must undergo review by both source reviewers and technical readers for accuracy, and a League reading committee for a check on bias, etc. Resolutions of differences rest with the Executive Committee. Document then goes to editor for final edit for style consistency. These are important safeguards in ensuring the League study does not have problems of tone or content, and that it is as good as it can be.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities:

- A. Source Reviewers:** Individuals who provided original information shall be asked to review relevant parts of the study to be sure their information is accurately reflected.
- B. Reading Committee:** A reading committee consisting of at least three members with diverse interests, and degrees of experience shall be appointed by the president to review the study. (Full description of reading committee duties and responsibilities below).
- C. Reference Checker:** Board may appoint someone to double check endnote/reference citations.
- D. Study Committee Chair:** The study committee chair shall ensure that the study has been reviewed for technical accuracy by outside nonpartisan sources and/or members with special expertise in the area.

- E. Technical Reviewers:** The study committee chair shall select at least three third party reviewers who have been suggested by committee members based on what they have learned during their research. Reviewers shall be outside sources and/or members with special expertise in the study area who are able to be objective in their review.
- F. Editor:** The president, in consultation with the executive committee, may appoint an editor for the study. The editor will work with the committee chair(s) and the liaison and will be an individual who can be fair and objective in performing his or her duties. The editor is responsible for spelling and the final composition of the document. The board, in consultation with the board liaison, may specify the editor's additional responsibilities as well as interaction with the reading committee. A formatting editor may do the final layout of the document.
- G. Board or Executive Committee:** The board or executive committee shall make the final decision if differences between the reading committee and the editor or study committee chair cannot be resolved. **Final authority for content will rest with the board or executive committee.**

III. How the process works:

- A. Source Review:** Study committee returns document or pertinent parts to those who had been interviewed to be sure the writing accurately reflects what the source provided.
- B. Reading Committee Review:**
- Reading committee members shall review the integrated draft including Executive Summary submitted by the study editor for bias, balance, completeness, style, clarity, accuracy, organization and adherence to the scope adopted by convention.
 - Reading committee is not responsible for editing, spelling, or rewriting, but may perform those functions if requested to by the President or board.
 - Proposed changes must be returned to the editor or the study committee chair for evaluation and/or implementation.
 - The final draft shall be re-read and approved by the reading committee before submission to technical reviewers.
 - Revisions from technical reviewers shall be incorporated by the study committee and then be returned to the reading committee for its sign-off.
 - Differences between the reading committee and the editor or study committee chair which cannot be resolved shall be brought to the board or the executive committee for a final decision.
 - Final authority for content will rest with the executive committee, should disagreement arise between the reading committee and the editor or committee chair.
 - Reading committee shall review draft consensus questions and provide input.

C. Technical Review:

- Technical review will help ensure technical accuracy.
- The suggested changes from the technical reviewers should be incorporated unless there is clear reason not to do this, such as disagreement among the technical readers on a point of fact. Such an issue must be resolved with care, with the assistance of the reading committee.

IV. Key considerations:

- A.** The review process for a League study is very important in ensuring a quality product, and must be given significant weight. In the case of disagreement between the study committee and the reading committee, conflicts will be resolved by the board.
- B.** The most important thing to remember here is that the study does not belong to the study committee alone, but is the ultimate responsibility of the board, which gives the final approval for its publication. Providing an accurate, unbiased and clearly written document is in everybody's best interest, and the review process is essential in making this happen.

5 – Approval of Study Document

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

The finished document including Executive Summary goes to the board for final stamp of approval.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities:

- A. Board:** approves final study document and makes arrangements for publication and use of document.
- B. Formatting Editor:** If formatting of document has not been done by previous editor, Board may select another editor to prepare camera-ready document.

III. How the process works:

- A.** After board or executive committee gives final approval, document is ready for publication (see page 12).
- B.** Executive Summary becomes a useful tool for promoting the study.

IV. Key considerations:

At this point, all of the hard work is completed... This is one final look before board approval.

6 - Publication

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

Once the study is completed it is ready for publication, followed by dissemination to members for discussion and potential consensus, and to the public for information.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities:

- A. Board:** Approves funding of publication/dissemination. May take into consideration recommendations from study committee for possible grant proposals as well as ideas for report dissemination beyond League membership
- B. Office Staff:** Seeks printing bids for document
- C. Formatting Editor:** Puts document into final format with text, pictures & graphics.

III. How the process works:

- A. Camera-Ready Document:** prepared by formatting editor. Studies should be standard in appearance, and include appropriate recognition to the League, the study committee, editor, project manager, the technical reviewers and the reading committee. The length of the study should be dependent upon the study scope, the complexity of the issues and available resources.
- B. Printing:** Printer choice should be made on the basis of price, quality, convenience and dependability. A union shop should be chosen. Recycled paper and non-toxic ink should be used whenever possible.
- C. Funding:** Funding for the study process is usually a part of the Education Fund biennial budget. It should cover expenses such as paper, phone, copies, travel by committee members, printing and distribution of the report. If additional funds are necessary to cover special publication expenses, the Education Fund Board may, in conjunction with the study committee, submit grant proposals to foundations and other organizations.
- D. Copyright:** All League studies should be copyrighted. On the recommendation of the study committee, the executive committee or the board shall determine when application should be made for official copyright. The board shall be responsible for the copyright application. Copyright publications shall include a statement similar to *"All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part by any means without permission of the publisher."* Release of copyright, or permission to reproduce League studies or materials must be approved by the executive committee or the board. Requests for release must be made in writing, stating the purpose or use and why it is necessary to reproduce the material. Approval in writing by the board or executive committee must include conditions for the release.

E. Sales:

- Pricing: Sales price should reflect all actual costs, including overhead, as well as outside grant money. A selling price should be suggested which enables local Leagues to receive a stipend for handling sales at the local level if they so desire. Bulk orders received in advance of publication may be sold at a discount, which reflects the reduced cost per copy realized by any large press run.
- Sale of Publications: All sales are taxable unless the purchaser designates in advance that the merchandise is for resale. Non-league purchasers must provide a resale tax number. To meet IRS requirements it is necessary to distribute League reports beyond our members.

IV. Key considerations:

This step includes the second of the two study committee funding requests. Funding at this point is for publication/printing expense and the cost to distribute the document to League members and others.

7 - Consensus Process to Position Statement

I. Description/definition -- goals and purpose.

If consensus is reached, a position statement is created on the topic that was studied. It is possible that there will not be a consensus following the study.

II. Key Players, their Roles and Responsibilities (see Timeline Template, Appendix A., page 16 for order and timing):

A. Study Committee Chair and Study Committee:

- Submits draft consensus questions that have been reviewed by the reading committee to board
- Receives local League/unit reports and compiles data
- Prepares report and drafts position statement for consideration by Board

B. Board

- Evaluates and approves consensus questions presented by study committee and as reviewed by reading committee.
- Distributes consensus report form with the study document to local Leagues/units
- Evaluates study committee report/position statement
- Finalizes and approves position, which then immediately becomes a League position and can be used.

III. How the process works:

A. Committee drafts consensus questions:

- The committee will draft proposed consensus questions to be submitted to the reading committee for comment and then by the liaison to the board for consideration and approval. Final approval of consensus questions rests with the board of directors.
- The consensus questions should:
 - Speak to the focus and scope of study
 - Be answerable from information in the published study.
 - Be short, simple, and unbiased.
 - Avoid leading people to the "right" answer.
 - Avoid emotionally loaded words.
 - Avoid so many specifics that the resulting information would become outdated quickly.
 - Avoid being so open-ended that the resulting responses would be too broad to be useful as data for consensus.
 - Generally avoid references to specific legislation.
 - Be capable of being answered by non-experts.
 - Be limited in number so they can be answered in the time available for local League discussion.

B. Board reviews/edits/approves Consensus Questions

C. Board prepares and distributes report form: After the questions are approved they are placed on a form with a **due date** for return and distributed for use (either by state office to the local Leagues or to units/members for a local study). Study questions must be sent printed separately from the study document – IRS rules!. A list of resources, readings and possible speakers could be developed by the committee and sent with the consensus form.

D. Consensus Participation: Members in local Leagues participate in meetings to discuss and respond to consensus questions using materials and forms as provided by LWVWA for state studies or local board for local studies. The reports from the unit meetings shall clearly indicate whether or not consensus was reached. If a question is left blank, say why: "we did not reach consensus" or, "we did not have enough time to deal with this question."

For State Studies

- Each local League shall submit a single response form. If multiple units meetings are held, then the local board must compile that League's response.
- The local League board shall compile and approve the consensus statement based upon its review of the consensus reports from their unit meetings. The local League board shall submit the consensus statement to LWVWA. All consensus reports from the units shall be submitted to LWVWA as attachments to the

consensus statement approved by the local League board.

- The consensus form submitted to LWVWA shall have the name of the local League, date of the board meeting, and number of local League members participating in the consensus meetings.

For Local Studies – Local board will evaluate report from meeting(s) to recommend local position.

E. Study committee compiles consensus data from local Leagues/units and proposes

Position Statement: The study committee shall prepare a report and a proposed statement of position based on a compilation of data from consensus report forms, and submit it to the board for review, discussion and final approval. The study committee's data compilation sheets as well as all of the raw consensus data should be attached to the report to the board.

F. Board evaluates consensus

After the study committee has submitted the evaluation of the consensus forms sent in by local Leagues or units, the board evaluates whether or not agreement was reached:

- Based on member agreement, not the personal views of the committee or board members,
- With clarification of what constitutes "agreement", if voting was the decision-making process,
- With understanding that agreement must be among a group representative of the membership as a whole, and
- With recognition that consensus efforts do not always lead to agreement.

Following this evaluation the board accepts or rewrites the position statement as drafted by the study committee, based on the areas of member agreement

G. Board adopts position statement.

IV. Key considerations/definitions:

Consensus: After study and discussion; "consensus," or member agreement, is reached by members through group discussion. Consensus is not a simple majority, nor is it necessarily unanimity; rather, it is the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions. Consensus rests on a common base of knowledge of members well informed on the subject.

Detailed information on reaching consensus is in the LWVWA Policies and Procedures VIII - Reaching Member Agreement.

Appendices/Supplements

Appendix A. Timeline template - LWV Effective Study Guide – Two-year Timeline

Year 1

- June – Study adopted at Convention
- June/July – President appoints the study chair and committee. Committee meets with liaison to develop study plan and committee budget
- Sept. – Study committee submits plan to board for approval and then begins steps to produce the study (research, meet, write)
- May/June – Study committee completes study, writes Executive Summary and creates draft consensus questions

Year 2

- June/July/Aug – Review
 1. Board-appointed Reading committee reviews study, Executive Summary, and draft consensus questions (June)
 2. Resolution of differences
 3. Committee chair sends document for Technical Review (July)
 4. Resolution of differences
 5. Send final document (before format editing) to board so that when it meets in September to approve consensus questions, directors are comfortable that information to answer questions can be found in the report.
- Sept. – Final content approval; Document goes to editor for format editing; Board reviews and approves consensus questions
- Oct./Nov – Study is printed and distributed
- Dec through Feb – Study is available to LL for study and consensus questions response
- March – Consensus reports returned to study committee; Committee drafts report and recommended position statement.
- May – Board adopts new position at Board Meeting.
- June – New position included in Program Re-adoption at Convention

Appendix B. sample letters and forms are on LWVWA website. (www.lwvwa.org)

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