

Observer Corps and Action Policy & Procedures League of Women Voters of Door County

Purpose:

One of the best ways to improve the quality of government is to “put it in the spotlight.” Sometimes videotaping governmental meetings can accomplish this, but most government business occurs without this watchful eye. League has long believed in the value of an observer corps whose job it is to stay abreast of issues by maintaining a presence at as many government meetings as possible.

Benefits:

- Government officials perform more responsibly.
- Citizens can participate in government decision-making in a timely and effective way.
- Decisions made by government are more balanced and reflective of the wishes of the electorate.
- Communication between League and local governmental officials and agencies is strengthened. League members become more engaged.
- League observers become experts in local government.
- League members see how the organization’s mission is actually being fulfilled. Individuals are provided a specific way to get involved with League.
- Attendance at meetings helps League identify larger community issues, concerns, or trends that may shape future programs and work.
- League will be more visible; may attract new members.

League Observers

Requirements:

- Member of LWV
- Knowledge, understanding, and adherence to LWV DC Policies and Procedures
- Participation in an Observer Corps orientation to review Open Meetings / Open Records Law, Non-partisan policy, Observer Corps policy, Guidelines for Taking Action, and the Observer Corps Report Form with President or Action Chairman
- Adoption of at least one governmental body or committee and attendance at all of their meetings to the best of their ability OR serve as a substitute for other observers as their schedule permits
- Attempt to find a substitute if they are unable to attend a meeting

Procedures:

1. Select a committee or governmental body and find out the name of the chairman, members, and time and place of meeting.
2. Contact the chairman and clerk of the governmental body to introduce yourself and arrange to get an agenda and materials packet previous to each meeting.

3. If there is a cost for receiving the materials make arrangements with the LWV DC President or Observer Corps Coordinator for payment or reimbursement.
4. Using available resources become acquainted with how the committee or governmental body functions. For example: What are their supervisory and/or financial responsibilities? What rules or procedures guide the group and the committees and departments they oversee? What are the rules for public participation for this group?
5. Watch and learn as issues come and go during the year. Be alert to Open Meetings compliance.
6. Attend meetings wearing a LWV button. At the first meeting attended, introduce yourself and your purpose during the public participation portion of the meeting.
7. After each meeting complete an Observer Corp report form and send it (electronically or snail mail) to the Observer Corps Coordinator.
8. When issues important to League arise, work with the Observer Corps Coordinator, Action Chairman, President, or designated Board Member to take action on behalf of a League position.
9. Prior to making a statement of oral testimony or submitting a written testimony a copy should be reviewed by the Observer Corps Coordinator, Action Chair or President. Action Chair will file the final copy.
10. Use your role as an opportunity to build trust and respect between government and the League by being courteous and demonstrating that observers are there to learn, not to judge. League wants to be a valuable resource to elected officials and to support them on issues aligned with League positions.

Observer Corps Coordinator Responsibilities

- Serve as coordinator of Observer Corps activities.
- Recruit and orient new members to Observer Corps.
- Monitor and support the activities of observers.
- Receive and file Observer Corps Report Forms from meetings.
- Keep Observer Corps Report files.
- Monitor Observer Corps Report Forms and work with the Action Chair if action may be warranted.
- Work with Action Chair to determine whether current LWV positions support action on issues related to local government.
- Contact board and / or state League for further advice when it is unclear whether action is supported by existing positions.
- Work with Action Chair to prepare action plan as appropriate, on issues related to local government. This may be done in partnership with an individual observer, President or Board Designee.
- Prepare periodic brief summaries of observer corps activities for membership update.

Action Chairman Responsibilities

- Serve as a resource to Observer Corps and other LWV members.
- Work with the Observer Corps coordinator to determine if action may be warranted on issues related to local government.
- Research LWV positions to determine whether existing LWV positions (local, state, or national) support preferred action.
- Contact board and / or state League for further advice when it is unclear whether action is supported by existing positions.
- Prepare action plan as appropriate, with President or Board Designee. This may be done in partnership with the Observer Corps Coordinator and/or an individual observer on issues related to local government. Implement the action steps, including preparation of action alerts for LWV members.
- Keep action files (hard copy and Yahoo group)
- A written statement of **oral testimony** will be submitted to Action Chair for the action files. Copies of **action letters** and **written testimony** will also be kept in the action files.
- Notify LWV WI if action is on a state issue that has not been solicited by the state League.
- Prepare brief periodic summaries of actions and the results as well as other action alerts for membership updates.

Guidelines for Taking Action

League takes action only when supported by League positions.

When issues important to League arise, the Action Chair will work with the President, or Board Designee or Observer Corps Coordinator and/or individual observer on issues related to local government, to take action on behalf of a League position. It must be determined whether current League positions support action on this issue. Contact the board and/or state League for further advice when it is unclear whether action is supported by current League positions.