

Local Study Process – How Does Our LWV Choose the Topics It Studies?

No LWV can take a position on an issue or advocate for or against an issue without first studying that issue at the local, state or national level. LWVs can use positions at the state and national level to support advocacy on local topics; however, advocacy usually has more credibility if a study has been conducted at the local level. Topics for local study are proposed at a program planning meeting, or to the board, in writing, at any time up until the board meeting prior to 30 days before the annual meeting, usually held in May.

Proposed topics include a short (written) summary of the proposed study, including its scope. Members may submit any local issue that can be impacted by La Plata County voters that members feel the LWV needs to be able to weigh in on. The LWV may or may not already have a position relating to the topic or the member may feel the current position needs updating. Since the LWV never supports or opposes candidates or parties, the LWV does not study individual candidates or parties. The LWV has a process for adopting emergency studies, which is frequently used if the LWV wants to take a position on a ballot issue on a November ballot.

At the last board meeting prior to the 30-day deadline, when the annual meeting materials must be mailed to members, the board reviews the suggested study topics. The board gauges the importance, timeliness and appropriateness of the studies, their appeal to the membership and the amount of energy available during the following year for local studies. The board ‘recommends’ one or more studies if it chooses to. Sometimes a board chooses not to recommend a study unless a study committee chair has already come forward.

The proposed studies (recommended by the board or not) are sent out in the annual meeting mailing. At the annual meeting the proposed studies are discussed and voted by the membership. Adoption of a study not recommended by the board takes a supermajority, whereas adoption of a recommended study takes a majority vote. If one or more studies are adopted, study committee volunteers are solicited.

The study committee meets, refines and defines the scope of the study (possibly narrowing but not expanding it) and develops consensus questions that will form the basis of a position should consensus of the membership be reached after thorough study.

The study committee researches background material to educate the membership and decides how to present it to the membership: speakers or panels, newsletter articles, go-see tours, whatever is appropriate. These opportunities are open to the public, if practical.

A consensus session is arranged at the end of the study. Only LWV members participate in consensus sessions. Non-members are welcome to observe. At this session the membership, under the guidance of a neutral discussion leader, discusses each consensus question and tries to reach consensus on it, namely, an answer with which all members present are comfortable. Consensus is not a vote. The study committee members wear two hats, that of resource persons, as well as regular LWV members whose opinions do not have greater weight than the opinion any other LWV member. Consensus may not be reached on all questions.

Following the consensus meeting, the study committee drafts a position statement that summarizes the points on which the membership has agreed and submits this draft position to the board. The board decides whether the position appropriately represents what emerged from the consensus meeting and whether there was sufficient participation of the membership such that it

truly represents the sense of the whole local LWV. If so, the board approves the position and our LWV can begin to use it. The new position then joins our collection of local positions developed over the years, all of which are reviewed each year at the annual meeting in May. The membership can vote to modify, update or eliminate a position at an annual meeting.

As always, individual LWV members are not bound by LWV positions and vote their consciences at the ballot box. Members speaking in the name of the LWV and certain high profile LWV officers may not speak against a position.

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