

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WISCONSIN, INC.
612 W Main Street, Suite 200, Madison, WI 53703
608-256-0827 | www.lwvwi.org | lwvwisconsin@lwvwi.org

2025-2026 Program-Making Packet

Schedule:

November 2025	• Study suggestions solicited from local Leagues for LWVWI Program • Local Leagues may communicate with other Leagues regarding possible study topics • Legislative Committee may make suggestions based on what they see as future issues • Suggestions due to LWVWI office by February 20, 2026
Dec 2025/ Jan 2026	Local Leagues discuss and gather members' opinions about LWVWI Program as outlined in Leaders Guide to Program-Making
February 20, 2026	Local League suggestions for LWVWI Program due to LWVWI office
February 2026	LWVWI collates suggestions from local Leagues and forwards to LWVWI Board
March, 2026	LWVWI Board analyzes responses, recommends a proposed 2024-2025 Program
March, 2026	Call to Annual Meeting and publish recommended Program
Late April/Early May, 2026	Annual Meeting materials with recommended and non-recommended LWVWI Program sent to local Leagues
June, 2026 Annual Meeting	Delegates to Annual Meeting consider and adopt the 2024-2025 LWVWI Program

Contents:

- Program-Making Report Form – **due February 20, 2026**..... (one per local League)
- Leader's Guide to State Program-Making..... Page 2
- Program-Making Guidelines – Definitions/Criteria..... Page 5
- Reaching Member Agreement..... Page 6
- From Study to Action – What Happens After State Consensus?..... Page 8

Please direct questions to: Brandi Suryn, Membership & Events Manager, bsuryn@lwvwi.org,
(414) 841-8785

Leader's Guide to State Program-Making

I. PURPOSE

This is YOUR chance, every member's chance, to take part in a statewide grassroots planning process. Emphasize that members are being asked to look at what League does BEST. We ask that local Leagues consider the following when responding:

- 1) member support of and commitment to the current League positions;
 - [LWVWI State Positions \(Exhaustive\)](#), [LWVWI Summary of Positions](#)
 - [LWVUS National Positions](#)
- 2) member commitment to a program and action agenda as expressed by the League positions; and
- 3) member support and commitment to new, revised, or expanded program and action areas for consideration by the Annual Meeting.

II. PROCESS

Step One: Review Existing Positions

In evaluating current League positions, consider whether:

- 1) the goals addressed by the position have been met,
- 2) there is still member interest, understanding, and agreement on the item, and
- 3) the position is still relevant.
 - Existing positions provide the basis for League action, including lobbying. If the position is dropped, no action can be taken in that area without a new study.
 - The options regarding existing positions include recommendations to:
 - 1) retain the current position, 2) restudy or update part or all of a position, and 3) drop a position.

Step Two: Consideration of New Items

- In determining which new program item(s) to recommend, a local League should be guided by the careful consideration of the resources at both the local and state levels needed to accomplish any item(s), relative to the interest and commitment of its members.
- A state study or action focus means on-going local involvement and activity on the item. **It is therefore important for a local League to consider possible state program items in the context of its local program and activities and its own willingness or ability to participate.**
- In evaluating a new study idea or proposed action focus, consider the following:
 - 1) Does your League have a strong and broad member interest in the issue?
 - 2) Is your League willing and able to work on the issue?
 - 3) Is the issue statewide?
 - 4) Will timing and political realities permit effective League action?
 - 5) Is League involvement likely to make an impact?
 - 6) Is there an existing [state](#) or [national](#) position that can be used as a basis for action? If yes, an action focus is needed; if no, a new study is needed.

III. PREPARATION

Materials and considerations:

- 1) [LWVWI State Positions \(Exhaustive\)](#), [LWVWI Summary of Positions](#), [LWVUS National Positions](#)
- 2) Criteria for choosing any new study
 - a) League policy: Can the problem you want to study be solved by government action? Does the

- proposal fall within the [League Principles](#)?
- b) Timeliness: Is this a hot issue? Is the political timing right? Will study lead to effective action? Will the League's involvement make a difference?
 - c) Membership: Will this issue attract new members? Will it increase member interest and involvement? Will it showcase what League does best?
- 3) [Program-Making Report Form](#) and suggestions from local Lively Issues or other meeting of the membership to discuss program.
- 4) Meeting Details:
- Discussion Leaders—Seek discussion leaders who are familiar with state program and, if possible, who have been to a state annual meeting or convention and understand the program selection process.
- Consultation—Decide with your board about the format of the meeting, which, if any, of the methods mentioned here will you use, time available (i.e. this is timed for 90 minutes) and best locale for meeting (in-person, virtual, or hybrid). Involve as many people as possible to assure their presence. Consider consulting and/or inviting public officials, community leaders, contributors or other non-member friends or experts.

IV. THE MEETING

Introduction—Review purposes of the meeting. Review the process. Review Principles and Criteria. Review what needs to be done and the time. Appoint a recorder.

Review and Discussion of Current Positions—Have the current [Position Papers](#) as available references. Read titles from the “[State Program-Making Report Form](#)” and ask members to:

- 1) Choose four issues to focus upon in the next 2 years
- 2) Identify any items which should be dropped.
- 3) Identify any changes to current program positions that are recommended for re-adoption, i.e., under Government? Under Social Policy? etc. Encourage the participants to think carefully about each position under discussion. Sample questions: Is there a reasonable change for future action? Do we still have member agreement?
- 4) Summarize (recorder can do this). Try to determine agreement on areas for focus knowing that the legislative committee and the state board must be guided also by outside events, and all action, of course, is based on [LWV positions](#).

Discussion of New Study Options

- 1) Review criteria for a new study.
- 2) Ways to stimulate discussion and choose new study (pick one of these or devise your own):

Advocates—Appoint advocates ahead of time, have them dress to represent their issue, make pins or signs, become champions of the cause, *a la* political convention platform debate.

Leading Questions—During the first part, just list the issues; try not to have detailed discussion.

- a. What were the big issues in the state election?
- b. What were the big issues in the last legislature?
- c. What will be the big issues in the next legislature? Three years from now?
- d. Which issues suggested by local Leagues interested you?
- e. Of all the issues so far, which do you wish to consider? Before discussion, rank them quickly.
- f. Divide the remaining discussion time among the issues selected and set the limits for discussion and lobbying.
- g. Vote

Developing the Program Recommendation—Please take the time to flesh out the study or focus you are recommending. Comment on scope, purpose, and areas for action. Tell how you think it will help position the League of Women Voters as the leading citizens' organization in Wisconsin.

V. **REPORTING**

Review the recommendations from all of your units or meetings. Fill out the [report form](#) and email (preferred) or mail to the state office by **Monday, February 21, 2025**.

Program-Making Guidelines -- Definitions/Criteria

Definitions:

- DROP** — Position is no longer useful in its present form or is not supported by members. Action on the position will end. Any future action must be taken on other positions or will require a new study.
- RETAIN** — Members are committed to the position and will be involved in supporting LWVWI efforts to pursue position's goals. It is assumed that member understanding and agreement exist.
- UPDATE** — A study of limited scope is requested to reevaluate an existing position in light of new information, changed circumstances, and/or conflict with an existing position, the aim being to consider a position change.
- STUDY** — A new study is requested to gather information for discussion by members with the aim of reaching consensus and establishing a position. Usually a two-year process.

Criteria:

DROP a position after considering the following questions:

1. Has the position been substantially achieved?
2. Is the position still meaningful today?
3. Does the position represent current member thinking?
4. Do members care enough about it to take action and devote resources to it?
5. How old is the position? Has it been used recently?

RETAIN a position if you do not want to **DROP** or to **UPDATE** that position.

UPDATE a position after considering the following questions:

1. Is new information available which might change the position?
2. Have the circumstances surrounding the position changed significantly?
3. Does the position conflict with another League position?
4. Do members need a thorough update in order to have the understanding necessary to take action?
5. Are there gaps in the position which need to be filled-in?

RECOMMENDATION FOR ADVOCACY AGENDA: This is intended to give the state board feedback about the positions on which members would like to take action.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR RECOMMENDING A NEW STUDY:

- * Is the issue one on which League members will spend time, effort and League money?
- * Is this the crucial time for this issue?
- * Will League involvement make a difference?
- * Do political realities permit effective action?
- * Can the League make a worthwhile, effective contribution?

* Can we take action on the issue under existing state or national positions?

Reaching Member Agreement

CONSENSUS has two meanings (but only one spelling). In its larger sense (and the way in which it is usually used outside League), it means "Collective opinion or concord; general agreement or accord." (American Heritage Dictionary) In short, in this larger sense, **consensus** means **member agreement**.

The second meaning of **consensus** refers to a **specific technique** for arriving at agreement within League. It is a process by means of which members participate in group discussion of an issue. Usually there are formal "consensus" questions to which the group is responding. It is possible to reach consensus on a point even though a specific question has not been asked. If, for instance, you are discussing the question, "What, if any, role should the state have in jail administration?" and, in covering the financing aspects, you decide more money is needed so you can have a full-time rather than a part-time matron, you have reached consensus on that point. The important thing to remember is that **consensus** when used as a **technique** requires people meeting together and discussing freely. (It does not mean people meeting together and listening to the Program committee tell them how it is.) If a member cannot attend a consensus-reaching meeting, offer him/her the opportunity to express his/her opinion in another way, such as telling someone on the Program committee, writing it down, email/phoning it in, etc. BUT, to have really reached consensus, most members participating in the consensus should have done so at a discussion meeting.

Question: How many members have to take part to make it a valid consensus? Answer: Who knows? Generally speaking, if your League has provided reasonably convenient times for the meetings, has informed the membership about them, has provided background information, has let them know of the areas to be discussed and no unforeseen disaster has occurred at the time of the meetings to prevent general attendance, you can consider you have reached consensus, even if only a few show up. Remember, member agreement is the basis for member action, and if you don't have reasonably good participation, you need to find out why.

CONCURRENCE is another method of reaching agreement. It is a method wherein one agrees or concurs with a position already stated. Groups of League members or League Boards can concur with recommendations of a Program committee or unit group, decision statements formulated by League Boards or positions reached by another League(s). The concurrence method can be used at a discussion meeting or be conducted through a telephone survey, etc.

The consensus method deals with questions; the concurrence method deals with statements. Therefore, the consensus question, "What, if any, role should the state have in jail administration?", for concurrence would be: "The state should set minimum standards in terms of physical surroundings, health and nutritional programs, and recreational and educational activities. Agree___ Disagree___ Modify___."

In addition, agreement may be reached through **questionnaires** or **polls**. These may be in question form or concurrence statements.

On all of the above methods, the question of how many members need participate is often raised. In some instances, the agreement may be reached by the Board rather than the membership. If League is to maintain maximum effectiveness, we need to continue to be a grassroots organization. That means members should always be given the widest possible opportunity to become informed, and to express their opinions.

CONCURRENCE, which has only one meaning, has, however, two major uses. (1) It was originally encouraged by some League members who felt that the League was spending too much time on studying and not enough time on doing. "Must we constantly reinvent the wheel?" they cried. "Why cannot we make use of the scholarship of other Leagues and concur with their decisions, thus being able to act more quickly or on more items?" It must be pointed out that even in this type of concurrence, members should be informed, though that information may be limited to a simple explanation of why the other League arrived at the decisions it did. (2) Using concurrence statements for a "from scratch" study (not borrowing existing positions from another League) enhanced the member agreement procedure by increasing the number of positions that could be arrived at. For example, in the first two years of the state Administration of Justice item on adult offenders, consensus questions were used. The state committee found that a number of issues were supported by some Leagues that had not even been discussed by others. There was no way of knowing whether those Leagues would have agreed with the issue IF it had been discussed in their local League. In the next two years of the study, concurrence statements were used in which the state committee put together a logical statement of philosophy based on their reading, which contained as many points as possible. The result was that we have many more support positions from the second biennium than the first, and thus more basis for action.

A local League should not assume that concurrence automatically means no discussion. As a matter of fact, most concurrences, when used in the second manner described above, require the same kind of study and discussion as consensus.

Remember that effective action needs to be based on strong agreement. Strong agreement needs to be based on good information. And that's what the League is all about.
--

From Study to Action— What Happens After State Consensus?

FROM STUDY...

After a program has been adopted at the state Annual Meeting, a chair is named by the Board of Directors and s/he recruits the study committee which will function for the next year and a half. Unlike a study committee at the local level, the state committee members do not have easy access to each other to discuss problems, review materials, etc. They may be separated by 10 or 300 miles, which translates into dollars whenever one reaches for the steering wheel.

Traditionally, state studies took two years, but referring to a "two-year study" is somewhat misleading for the chair and the committee. Realistically, the group had just about a year and a few months. Today, since we have moved to an Annual Meeting cycle, the study time frame is one year leaving only 8-10 months in reality for the committee to complete its work. If member agreement is to be reached and a position adopted at the next Annual Meeting, the research and publishing must be completed in this time span. During the course of the study, the study chair must bring certain items for Board approval as well as keep them informed on month-to-month progress. The Board should be informed by the committee of the following items: the outline of study, the committee members, the agreement deadline, plans and speakers for workshops, the type of publications (quantity and cost if a book), the member agreement form, and the results of the member agreement and position statement.

The final task of the study committee is to compile the member agreement and draft a position statement based upon that agreement. Compiling this agreement usually takes a full day. Often the chair makes a preliminary breakdown of responses and judgments which are analyzed and refined by the committee. This agreement draft then goes to the Board, where substantial time is devoted to analyzing the draft. Sometimes clarification is needed on one or another local response, and if necessary, Leagues are asked to comment again.

...TO ACTION

When a position has been accepted by the Board and approved by the Membership, it is sent to the local Leagues, and implementation may begin immediately.

Questions sometimes arise after consensus has been reached. First, should a local League publish its local consensus on a state item in its bulletin? The answer is, not until after the state position has been published. There are some practical reasons for this: local bulletins usually go out to non-League members and organizations in the community, most of whom do not discriminate among League levels. Thus, a local consensus might be construed to be a state consensus, when in fact the agreement on the local level (or some part of it) may not have statewide support. Another reason for holding off printing the local consensus is that it is too easy for a member to become forever confused between the local and state consensus, because s/he first saw the local one which becomes indelibly impressed in her/his mind. However, it is important to remember that agreement on the local level (or some part of it) may not have statewide support. Naturally, local members are anxious to know their local agreement and it should be disseminated. A practical way to announce both and to keep confusion to a minimum is to publish them at the same time in the bulletin, clearly identifying each.

A second question is: what can local Leagues do when state consensus has been reached? **Guidelines for action locally on state positions are sent to Leagues. If in doubt, consult the president, executive director or state legislative chair. If a local League, for any reason, wishes to act at the state level, it must receive permission from state.** Generally, action at the state level is done by the state League.

After the state consensus has been reached, the next step is its implementation -- action! The state legislative committee is now responsible for analyzing all proposed legislation introduced that relates to the League's position. The committee's knowledge of individual representatives and senators (who support or oppose our position, who are pivotal, who will sponsor legislation, etc.) is very important. Sometimes the League is asked to co-sponsor a bill, or have its name attached as a supporter. It is well to remember that it is far more difficult to pass legislation than to defeat a bill, and the more the League can exert influence during the pre-introduction stages, the stronger its role is. Equally important is knowing and working with other organizations who support our position (we sometimes enter into coalitions for this purpose) because the broader the base of support, the more likely that legislators will pay attention.

The legislative committee, after study of a bill and an analysis of its prospects and implications, makes recommendations for action. The committee's recommendations are then acted upon by the lobbyist. It is the legislative committee's responsibility to carry out the action plan. This includes appearing at legislature committee hearings, sending testimony, talking to legislators and sending Action Alerts.

The Legislative Committee meets twice a month when the legislature is in session, and members make trips to the capitol or other state agencies to lobby. They must be on top of things and close enough to be in the right spot at the right time. The State Board has a Legislative Committee Liaison who reports regularly on the activities of the committee.

The committee convener/chair and state League Legislative Coordinator) keep local Leagues informed on the progress of position implementation, and it is the responsibility of local Action chairs to see that this is communicated to the members. Background information is sent to Leagues, as well as all statements and letters issued by the state president or other designated persons. The Legislative Committee assists with the planning of Legislative Day or Issues Briefing; the committee chair/convener and Legislative Coordinator coordinate all legislative meeting activity. When the legislature is in session, the pace is often hectic, but their jobs are a year-round one, as they work with coalitions, plan statewide meetings or work with local Leagues to promote our positions.