

League of Women Voters of San Francisco

New Member Guide



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Dear League Member,

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of San Francisco Board of Directors, we extend our gratitude and welcome you to the League!

For more than 95 years we have engaged our members in community outreach, educating voters, advocating issues, and encouraging active participation in government. Your support of the League of Women Voters of San Francisco (LWVSF) allows us to continue this legacy and is the cornerstone to achieving our program goals.

The League is a platform for promoting civic involvement and participatory democracy. However, it is our members that move our ideas into the community and make change possible. With your support we are able to implement our Voter Services programs, including the Pros and Cons Guide, Candidate Forums, Speakers Bureau events, and voter registration outreach. In collaboration with San Francisco Government Television (SFGovTV), our forums and discussions are presented on public access television and hosted on our YouTube channel. These resources are used by voters to better understand local issues and to help inform decisions on election day.

The League also advocates on behalf of important issues. The League has been a longtime supporter of the Sunshine Ordinance, which gives citizens transparency into local government, and we are currently focused on efforts to strengthen and modernize this ordinance. While we never support or oppose candidates, the League also takes positions on issues and makes recommendations on ballot propositions. We also hold permanent seats on certain boards and commissions, such as the Sunshine Ordinance Task Force and the Ballot Simplification Committee, which gives the League a consistent voice in local government.

A great way to get to know fellow League members is to join a committee such as Development, Membership, Education, Voter Services, or Advocacy to name a few. There are also short-term volunteer opportunities such as candidate forms, Speakers Bureau, voter registration, and many other events. Information on committee meetings and how to get involved can be found later in this guide.

Our members support much of our work simply through joining the League and we thank you for your enthusiasm! As you embark on your League career, we invite you to move beyond the expected and explore new opportunities for growth. We hope that you will embrace our shared commitment to non-partisan political engagement in our collective efforts to impact San Francisco in a positive way. We look forward to working with each of you and getting to know more about your aspirations for the League. We are very fortunate to have such a diverse group to help guide our organization into the future.

Warmest regards,
Leah Edwards
President

About the League of Women Voters San Francisco

Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, multi-issue organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. We are an organization of women and men who want to make a difference in the political future of our communities.

Principles

Principles are concepts of government, supported by the League as a whole, which constitute the authorization for adoption of national, state, and local Program.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) believes...

- In representative government and in the individual liberties established in the Constitution of the United States.
- That democratic government depends upon the informed and active participation of its citizens and requires that governmental bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible.
- That responsible government should maintain an equitable and flexible system of taxation, promote the conservation and development of natural resources in the public interest, share in the solution of economic and social problems which affect the general welfare, promote a sound economy, and adopt domestic policies which facilitate the solution of international problems.
- That efficient and economical government requires competent personnel, the clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing, and coordination among the different agencies and levels of government.
- That cooperation with other nations is essential in the search for solutions to world problems, and that the development of international organization and international law is imperative in the promotion of world peace.
- That every citizen should be protected in the right to vote; that every person should have access to free public education which provides equal opportunity for all; and that no person or group should suffer legal, economic, or administrative discrimination.

Brief History

The League of Women Voters was formed in 1920 as an outgrowth of the movement to give women the right to vote following the passage of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution. That amendment was ratified in 1920, after a 57-year struggle. Early on, the League was described as a “mighty political experiment” designed to help 20 million women carry out their

new responsibilities as voters. It encouraged them to use their new power to participate in shaping public policy, and pave the way for those after them.

Carrie Chapman Catt is generally credited as being the founder of the League. She described her vision of the League in April 1919 as such: "The politicians used to ask why we wanted to vote. They seemed to think we want to do something particular with it, something we were not telling about. They did not understand that women wanted to help improve the general welfare of the people."

The roots of LWVSF can be traced to November 1911, the same month that women in California were granted the right to vote and before the League of Women Voters was even founded. During that time the College Equal Suffrage League, which had fought for women's suffrage, evolved to become the California Civic League, which had branches all over the state. The San Francisco Chapter of the California Civic League was quite a large organization, and placed most of its focus on reforming the public school system and establishing a Board of Education and Superintendent. In August 1920, the California Civic League voted to join the League as the San Francisco Center of the California League of Women Voters, adopting the League's goal of eliminating legal discrimination against women. By 1925, membership was up to over 2,000!

Since its creation, San Francisco's League role has continued to evolve and change with the times. In the 1940s, the League was instrumental in supporting the study and funding of affordable child care. In 1959, the 23 Leagues in the Bay Area joined together to discuss issues facing the region, and April 1961 brought the establishment of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area (LWVBA), an "Inter-League Organization," an ILO, the official title given to such a group of Leagues organized to address area-wide or regional problems. In the 1960s, LWVSF's work focused internationally on world disarmament, foreign aid funds and the Peace Corps, including programming around the 1965 San Francisco meeting of the UN. In 1976, LWVSF hosted the first presidential debates in 16 years between Republican President Gerald Ford and Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter. A very interesting and thorough pamphlet, titled "A Vote in Time," provides much more detail on the San Francisco League's founding is on file at our office. The website <http://www.lwv.org/history> provides articles, videos and photographs of the national League's history. We invite you to check out both resources!

Clearly, the League of Women Voters has come a long way since it's founding, and there's still so much work to be done. Congratulations on joining LWVSF and becoming part of our rich and vibrant organization!

LWV SF, Bay Area, California and US Organizational Chart

The organization chart below helps depict the relationship between the levels of the League and how they relate to each other. This is important to understand how your membership in LWV SF fits into the bigger picture of what's going on with the League!

LWV US

LWV State Level (CA)

LWV Bay Area

Board of Trustees (Committee Chairs)

Provides direction and leadership for carrying out member decisions and is ultimately responsible for League's plans, activities and follow-through in three broad, interdependent areas:

1. Organization and Membership Management

Fundraising, grants, budget

Communications

Outreach to members

2. Programmatic

Study of issues

Application of studies to local legislative issues

3. Voter Services

Non-partisan

Candidate and public education programs

Administrative and policy making team for the League

Board and Committee Info

The LWVSF's Board of Directors is composed of the executive board and chair-people of each committee. Committees are responsible for carrying out much of our work and we encourage League members to join a committee and get involved in their work! Feel free to reach out to any of the committee chairs to find out more about their current projects, or stop by a committee meeting at the LWVSF office!

Executive Committee

President: Leah Edwards, l.edwards@lwvsf.org
Vice President, Development: Elisa Bond, development@lwvsf.org
Treasurer: Martha Benioff, treasurer@lwvsf.org
Secretary: Vanessa Royle, secretary@lwvsf.org

Monthly Committees

Advocacy Committee

The Advocacy Committee guides the League's work to encourage informed and active participation in government. Committee members develop the LWVSF's annual publication with our Ballot Positions and coordinate with League's election monitoring efforts

Chairs: Jenny Tse
Meetings: Third Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m.
Email: advocacy@lwvsf.org

Membership Committee

The Membership Committee helps coordinate member outreach and support through social and educational events. This committee organizes LWVSF Member events including the Spring Wine and Cheese, August Tea, Pre-Election Breakfast and Holiday Party.

Chairs: Rebecca Saar and Cheryl Harris
Meetings: Second Monday of each month at 5:30 pm
Email: membership@lwvsf.org

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee drives the League's publications and promotion. Its members generate the majority of the content for all of the League's communication, including the website, Facebook and Twitter pages, YouTube channel and email outreach.

Chairs: Leuwam Tesfai, Whitney Watts
Meetings: First Tuesday of every month at 6:00 pm
Email: communications@lwvsf.org

Project Committees

Voter Services Committee

The Voter Services Committee focuses on educating citizens to make informed choices and get involved in government. The committee spearheads the creation and development of many of our publications, including the Pro and Con Guide, televised debates and the Voter's Edge Website.

VP: Alison Goh

Email: alisonhgoh@gmail.com

Development Committee

The Development Committee plans and executes LWVSF's fundraising efforts. This committee is responsible for helping write grants, develop partnerships, and organize the annual appeal.

Contact: Elisa Bond

Email: development@lwvsf.org

Speakers Bureau

The Speakers Bureau is part of the Voter Services Committee. These trained League representatives speak at schools, churches, companies, neighborhood associations and other groups, presenting unbiased explanations of current ballot propositions.

Contact: Heather Sterner

Email: thesterners@sbcgobal.net

Finance and Budget Committees

The Finance Committee keeps tabs on the League's financials on an ongoing basis, making sure we're meeting fundraising goals and staying within our budget. This committee is responsible for creating the League's annual budget each spring.

Contact: Shannon Pinder (Budget Chair), Leah Edwards (President), Martha Benioff (Treasurer)

Email: treasurer@lwvsf.org

Education Committee

This committee is responsible for organizing forums on issues the LWVSF membership chose to focus on for each particular year, and works on supporting state and national studies.

Chair: Amelia Wiederaenders

Email: education@lwvsf.org

Annual Calendar

Here is a listing of annual events that take place on the local, state and national level that LWVSF members are encouraged to participate in. Partaking in events is a great way to get the most out of being a part of LWVSF!

JANUARY

Program Planning

LWVSF members gather for a half-day session to discuss what local, state and national positions we should focus on for the coming year. The event is organized by the Membership Committee, and the Advocacy Committee and Voter Services drive the content.

MAY

LWVSF Spring Member Wine and Cheese

This is one of the League's recurring member gatherings, centered on sharing content related to the June election or featuring an election-focused speaker. The evening allows members gather to mingle and discuss the League's work, their involvement and upcoming opportunities.

JUNE

National or State Convention

State Conventions are in odd numbered years and National Conventions are in even numbered years. At conventions, both at the state and national levels, League members come together to share the work that is going on at individual chapters. Leagues will share anything from the findings of issues studied locally to organizational advice on how they've grown. The conventions also provide the League a chance to make big-picture decisions that affect all chapters.

LWVSF Annual Meeting

At the Annual Meeting, LWVSF invites all members to hear about the work of the committees, changes to the board and upcoming plans. The board also presents the state of the League's financials and membership, and members in attendance may vote on issues that are brought before the membership at large. Attending the annual meeting provides a big picture view of where the League's been and where it's headed, especially for new members!

There is often also a June election!

JULY

LWVSF Board Orientation

For new board members, the Board Orientation is a crash course on the workings of the League and their role as League leadership. The event typically takes place on a weeknight and is hosted by an experienced League member and mentor to LWVSF.

AUGUST

LWVSF August Membership Tea

The August Tea is a social event, designed to bring members together over light snacks and tea. There is typically a brief presentation on a topic relevant to the League's work.

SEPTEMBER

LWVSF Member Pre-Election Breakfast

The Pre-Election Breakfast is a member gathering where the Advocacy and Voter Services Committees present the materials they've prepared on November election's ballot measures, providing both a non-partisan analysis of the issues and sharing the League's positions on them. Attendees have a chance to ask questions and discuss the issues with LWVSF's very own experts.

Candidate Forums and other Voter Services/Advocacy activities related to the election

LWVSF typically holds several forums in preparation of the coming election. The number and content vary based on what offices are up for re-election, but the League always organizes these forums to be non-partisan and give all candidates a platform to answer questions submitted by the community.

NOVEMBER

Election!

During the election, LWVSF is tapped to do a number of activities, including supporting the work of the SF Department of Elections, registering voters, and more. These responsibilities vary year to year, but are consistent with the League's reputation as a trustworthy, non-partisan organization.

DECEMBER

LWVSF Member Holiday Party

At the holiday party, members gather to celebrate the LWVSF's work during the past year, hear a brief presentation and look forward to the exciting things in store for the next year!

Terms to Know

Like any group, LWV uses a unique set of lingo, and even uses some everyday words to mean specific things. We've outlined some of the most common below.

Action – Promoting the League's positions on local, state and national public policy issues to government official, the media and the public

Action alert – request from the LWVUS or state League to take action in support of a League position.

Annual meeting – local year-end business meeting to elect officers and directors, vote on bylaw changes and adopt a budget and program of work

Consensus– collective opinion of a substantial number of League members, representative of the membership as a whole, after objective study of an issue

Concurrence – agreement by League members, with a position on an issue reached by a small group of members or by another League

Convention – A state or national League meeting held every other year at which delegates elect officers and directors for the biennium, adopt a program, make bylaw changes and adopt a budget, usually for one year. Local Leagues send delegates to national convention

Council – An assembly of delegates held in alternate years to adopt a budget and assess program developments. Local Leagues send delegates to state council, state League send delegates to national council

Education Fund – the tax-deductible arm of national, state and local Leagues, handling funds to be used only for educational purposes, not for action on issues

Life Member – a person who has been a member 50 years or more. Life members are excused from dues payment and their Leagues pay no per member payment for them

Inter League Organization (ILO) – formed by Leagues within a county, metropolitan area or region to act on issues that are beyond the local League area in scope

Member-At-Large (MAL) – a member who resides out of the area of, and is not enrolled in, a local League

Mal unit – A state-recognized group of Members-At-Large, in an area where there is no local

League

Non-Partisan Policy – The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes any political party or candidate

Per Member Payment (PMP) – The amount of money paid to the LWVUS and the state League on behalf of each member

Position – A statement of the League’s point of view on an issue, arrived at through member study and agreement (consensus or concurrence), approved by the appropriate board and used as a basis of League action

Principles – Governmental standards and policies supported by the League as a whole. They constitute the authorization and adoption of program at all levels

Programs – Plans for speakers, discussion or other activities for League meetings

Unit – Groupings of members within large local Leagues to provide more opportunity for discussion. Units may be time-oriented (day, evening, lunch hour), geographically oriented, or both.

Voter Guide – Nonpartisan publication giving candidates’ qualifications and positions on selected issues

Voter Service – Year-round activity to help citizens be politically effective and to encourage their participation in the political process. Registering voters and presenting factual, nonpartisan information on candidates and election issues are basic voters service activities.

Voting Members – All League members who are US citizens and at least 18 years old

FAQ

After looking at all this information, new members are bound to have questions! This list will help answer some of the most frequently asked questions...feel free to reach out with any other questions! We hope to keep this list evolving and growing as we hear from new members.

- **I joined the League (or I'm thinking about it)! How can I get involved?**

There are many ways to get involved with LWVSF's work. Visit the Volunteer Opportunities page (<http://www.lwvsf.org/volunteer/>) for a clear list of available opportunities. There are many short term and long term options to fit any schedule! Many of our volunteers choose to join a committee, to get the most updated information on volunteer opportunities and LWVSF's current projects. For further information regarding our committees, visit <http://www.lwvsf.org/about-the-league/committees/>.

Still unsure how to get involved? Email volunteer@lwvsf.org for help!

- **What do the Committees do?**

LWVSF's committees do the bulk of the League's work. Each committee has designated responsibilities, and are led through their tasks by the Committee Chair. Some committees meet on a monthly basis- Communications, Advocacy, and Membership- and some meet on an "as need" basis, and do the bulk of their work remotely- Voter Services, Education, Development, and Nominating. For further information regarding our committees, visit <http://www.lwvsf.org/about-the-league/committees/>

- **How do the actions of the League in SF relate to the actions of the League at the regional, state and national level?**

When you join the League, you join at the local level, but also become a member at the regional, state and national levels. Most members engage in-person most frequently at the local level – LWVSF members (and sometimes the public) are all invited to events put on by our local League. Where the levels of the League interact most is their work. The levels are related in a top-down structure, meaning that if the national League makes a decision, it applies to all Leagues on the state, regional and local level. There are positions that the national League has, for example, that must be adhered to by all of the Leagues in the US. However, if a local League studies and issue and develops a formal position, it isn't necessarily upheld all the way up to the national level.

Conventions are another way that the Leagues work together. LWV holds statewide conventions in odd years, and national conventions are held in even years. This is a great way for Leagues to interact and share best practices, and come to consensus on the League's future.

- **What are the benefits of becoming a League member?**

By being a member of a local League you actually can influence the work of a powerful, national organization because members get to vote on the focus areas of the local, regional, state and national Leagues. In addition to supporting and influencing the League's work, members can learn about local politics, meet face to face with their local representative, and get invited to exclusive, intimate league member only events.

- **Are my membership dues tax deductible?**

Yes, they are!

- **How is LWVSF funded?**

LWVSF is funded by a combination of grant sponsors and individual supporters. A small percentage of our income comes from membership dues.

- **How does the non-partisan policy impact League members?**

When people think of the League, they think of a trustworthy, non-partisan body. The title of "member of the League of Women Voters" indicates someone who embodies these traits, which can be difficult seeing as, of course, we are individuals with widely varying opinions and beliefs!

The most important consideration is to be aware of when you are being perceived as an individual, and when you are perceived as a League member. At League meeting or event, speaking about a League position or representing the League before public, members should remember the League's non-partisan policy. Any political activities members choose to engage in outside the League – attending a candidate rally, commenting on local policy, etc – should be done so outside their League affiliation.

- **How can I stay current with the League's activities and upcoming events?**

There are several ways to keep up to date with what's going on with the League!

- One of the best is our monthly newsletter, which is delivered via email and can be found archived here: <http://www.lwvsf.org/lwvsf-newsletter>
- National League newsletter: <http://lww.org/get-involved>
- State League newsletter: <http://lwvc.org/user/register>
- Our website: <http://www.lwvsf.org>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LWVSanFrancisco>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/lwvsf>

League Contact Information

League of Women Voters San Francisco (LWVSF)

- Website: www.lwvsf.org
- Email: lwvsf@lwvsf.org (for general information)
- Phone: (415) 989-8683
- Address:
League of Women Voters San Francisco
582 Market St Suite 615
San Francisco, CA 94104

League of Women Voters of the Bay Area (LWVBA)

- Website: www.lwvbayarea.org
- Email: president@lwvbayarea.org
- Phone: (510) 839-1608
- Address:
League of Women Voters Bay Area Inter-League Organization
436 14th Street Suite 1213
Oakland, CA 94612

League of Women Voters California (LWVC)

- Website: www.lwvc.org
- Email: lwvc@lwvc.org (for general information)
- Phone: (888) 870-8683 (toll free); (916) 442-7215
- Fax: (916) 442-7362
- Address:
League of Women Voters of California
921 Eleventh Street, Suite 700
Sacramento, CA 95814-3608

League of Women Voters United States (LWVUS)

- Website: www.lwv.org
- Email: through webpage <http://lwv.org/content/contact>
- Phone: (202) 429-1965
- Fax: (202) 429-0854
- Address:
League of Women Voters US
1730 M St NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036-4508