



The League of Women Voters of New York State
62 Grand Street, Albany, New York 12207
Phone: 518-465-4162 Fax: 518-465-0812
www.lwvny.org E-Mail: lwvny@lwvny.org

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS *of New York State*

Facilitator's Guide

For Concurrence on Two Proposed Updated LWVNY Positions:

Healthcare & Financing of Healthcare

Leading the members of a League in a consensus discussion requires preparation. First read through this entire packet, including the Participant's Guide. Then you will need to recruit a resource person (who has read all the study materials) and a recorder. LWVNY has prepared a PowerPoint to help focus the discussion. Your job is to keep the discussion moving, **and focus on the comparison of the current and new positions.** Don't let it veer off to a discussion about, for example, the details of Medicare.

You are leading the group to consensus about whether the group concurs, first, with the *New Position on Healthcare* and, second, with the *New Position on Financing of Healthcare*. After the group has discussed the questions about the issues in the positions they will need to decide if, on balance, they concur with each position. The wording of the positions cannot be changed, but the recorder should note any strong comments.

CONTENTS:

- Tips for Discussion Leaders
- Consensus & Concurrence
- Report Form for Local Leagues

Link to more information on Consensus and Concurrence:

<https://lwvnyonline.org/LLresources/in-league-11/InLeague.pdf> p 157-163.

PowerPoint for the Discussion is available by contacting Laura@lwvny.org. PDF version of the Powerpoint is posted on the state League website.

Download the PowerPoint, then practice sharing your screen – or, better, have someone else do the technical stuff.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

1. Help create the right atmosphere

- a. The leader **MUST** remain neutral and cannot share their own opinions during the discussion or decisions. Any leader with an obvious position could intimidate those opposing that opinion to speak out.
- b. Be sure the group understands they are to exchange ideas freely, that every opinion is solicited and welcomed.
- c. Ask members to each take responsibility so everyone has space to speak —and to use chat function to note common ground. Ask members who speak easily to consider holding back until everyone else who wants to speak has.
- d. Ensure you have a discussion leader, resource person, and recorder.

2. Have a plan to get discussion started

- a. At the beginning, define the two decisions, and request everyone focus on those. Remind the group that consensus means the “sense of the group” and that their role is to use the consensus process to concur or not with each proposed position.
- b. Begin with the proposed healthcare position and the 3 questions in the guide.
- c. Remind the group that their objective is to work through all the changes, determining which, if any, they largely agree about, and which have more complicated responses — but they do not need to reach consensus on each one
- d. Do not be afraid to wait a short time to allow the group to mobilize its thoughts. Do not call on people directly unless you are quite sure they are willing to speak.

3. Keep the discussion moving

- a. Use the questions prepared in the discussion guide to help the group move from point to point
- b. If the group disagrees, point it out. Where there is common ground, point it out.
- c. When agreement is reached in any area, or the reasons for conflicting opinions emerge, stop to summarize. This will give the group a feeling of accomplishment.
- d. If the group gets hopelessly bogged down on any point, ask resource leader to provide additional information which may help to clarify the issue, or help the group to distinguish facts from feelings. If points of view cannot be reconciled, summarize both and move on.
- e. Remember, the secret of keeping discussion moving is to recognize when the group is ready to move on. Lingering too long will strangle discussion with boredom; moving ahead too fast will strangle discussion with frustration.

4. Be alert to problem situations

- a. Over participation. See that no one holds the floor too long or too often. Ask the group to monitor their contributions, with those who have already spoken waiting to speak again until others have voiced their opinions. Refuse to be awed by the "dominant" person, the "expert." Call for another opinion from the group or resource leader. Help the "repeaters" by summarizing quickly the point they are making to the group. They repeat to make sure their views have come across and this will reassure them. Help the insecure "ramblers" to

feel they have a place in the group. If the "story tellers" go on long or off the subject, warmly suggest that the yarn be saved for after the meeting.

- b. Shy ones. It is not mandatory for each person to verbalize about every section, but do periodically remind the group that we want to hear from everyone who has an opinion on the questions they feel most strongly about.
5. **End the meeting ON TIME! — in this case after 60-90 minutes**
 - a. Ask the recorder to give the "sense of the group" for each position.
 - b. Make sure the group agrees with the summary. Ask for a show of hands to ratify conclusions if there is any doubt.
 6. **Help prepare the written report** — Note number of attendees and the "sense of the group" for supporting or rejecting each proposed position.
 7. **Your League should not publicize the results of its consensus.** That is for LWVNYS to do after it knows whether enough Leagues have participated and agreed in order to reach a valid NYS consensus

THE DISCUSSION LEADER

The most important prerequisite for a successful consensus meeting is a good discussion leader. Leaders should encourage all members to speak and welcome all points of view — even unpopular ones.

A discussion leader must pace the meeting so that all questions can be covered. Knowing how to move the group along without cutting off discussion is important. The leader should be attuned to repetition and recognize when arguments and opinions begin to be repetitive and nothing new is being said.

As areas of agreement become apparent, the discussion leader should announce them so that the group can agree or disagree with the interpretation. When a specific question is answered, the leader should say, "We agree that" In this way, members have a feeling of participation in the decision-making.

THE RECORDER

Having a recorder at the meeting is imperative. Recorders should limit their note-taking to the concurrence questions. Discussion leaders should be free to concentrate on their job without having to take notes or trust their memories. They call upon the recorders to summarize the discussion and agreements periodically for purposes of clarification.

THE RESOURCE COMMITTEE

The role of the resource committee at the meeting is probably the most challenging. Its basic function is to supply the facts, when asked, without taking over the discussion or forcing its opinions on others. Varying, and even opposite, opinions based on the same facts are possible and valid. Opinions based on fallacies, however, should be corrected.

Consensus & Concurrence

Consensus, or membership understanding and agreement, is the basis of the grassroots character and effectiveness of the League of Women Voters. The League is a study and action organization. Therefore it is important to have a clear expression of member views to determine what action to take. Consensus-taking is a complex procedure at the local, regional, state and national levels; it is puzzling to new members and challenging to experienced leaders.

What is Consensus?

As noted in League Basics (In League), "The American Heritage Dictionary defines consensus as 'collective opinion or concord; general agreement or accord.' In the League, 'consensus' is used (1) interchangeably with 'member agreement' to refer to the overall decision making process . . . by which a League Board determines that there is substantial agreement among members on an issue, and (2) to refer to a specific technique used traditionally in the League to discuss and arrive at conclusions on issues . . ."

"Consensus/group discussion is the technique most often used in the League for reaching member agreement. It is a process whereby members participate in a group discussion of an issue. The 'consensus' reached by members through group discussion is not a simple majority, nor is it unanimity; rather it is the overall 'sense of the group' as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions."

Concurrence, the act of agreeing with a statement of position, is one method of determining membership understanding and agreement as a basis for League action.

The use of concurrence on any issue is decided by the appropriate League board on the basis of the nature of the subject, the time available for decision-making and the resources or interest present in the League for research. The Board sets guidelines for the process, particularly those relating to who will be asked to concur, with whom and how. For example, the Board of a local League might ask its members to concur with a position statement arrived at by the League's resource committee or by the Board itself. The request for concurrence could be presented at a meeting or by telephone or by written questionnaire.

LOCAL LEAGUE RESPONSE FORM TO HEALTHCARE POSITION UPDATE

LEAGUE NAME _____

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AND NUMBER OF MEMBERS PARTICIPATING

Please complete this response form and forward it to the state League by March 10, 2021. Local League members who participate in a Local League process may not submit individual responses to the update.

1. Do you approve the new position on HEALTHCARE?

Please check one of the Following:

_____ YES

_____ NO-Retain the current position.

Comments

2. Do you approve the new Position on FINANCING OF HEALTHCARE?

Please check one of the Following:

_____ YES

_____ NO-Retain the current position.

Comments

Mail, Fax or Email completed form by March 10, 2021.

to: LWVNYS, 62 Grand St, Albany, NY 12207

Fax: 518-465-0812 Email: Laura@lwny.org

Questions: Call the League at 518-465-4162