

LWVNJ Leaders' Guide for the Campus Sexual Assault Study and Consensus

Introduction to the Study Process

Studies are part of League Program and, in League parlance. League Program includes all of the positions the League uses to affect public policy as well as the procedure for adopting these programs. Program is such an integral part of the League that, according to *League Basics*, the League, “Program is the League’s reason for being.”

Program has three parts:

- 1) selection of an issue,
- 2) study of that issue, consensus and formulating a position, and
- 3) use of that position to influence public policy.

All LWVUS positions are included in the League’s publication, *Impact on Issues, 2014-2016: A Guide to Public Policy Positions.*

LWVNJ positions are included in LWVNJ publication *Study and Action 2015-2017.* *Both of these publications can be found on the League websites.*

The purpose of a study, at any level, is to educate members so they can be informed participants in consensus and provide the necessary data for formulating the ultimate position.

As each local League reports its consensus (or lack thereof) the reports are consolidated, and, based on this information, the committee formulates the position which, when approved by the Board, can be used for action.

What is a consensus?

It is easier to say what consensus is not, than what it is. Consensus is not a vote; rather, consensus is mutual agreement of League members arrived at through discussion. During discussion, everyone has an opportunity to express their viewpoints, and the

issue is examined from all sides. Consensus questions, created by the appropriate study committee and approved by the Board, provide structure for the local meeting. Members of the local League or MAL Unit discuss the pros and cons until it becomes apparent that consensus has or has not been reached on each question. The results form a report which is sent to the state for processing. The LWVNJ study committee analyzes the consensus responses and, using this information, creates a position statement.

Scope: The scope of the study is ideally defined in the proposal approved by delegates at Convention. In some cases the Convention may have an unclear or preliminary scope, in which case the committee will refine it further. A scope describes the limits of the study, describes areas to explore and often includes focus areas. The culminating position will address only those issues delineated in the scope

Background materials: After establishing or refining the scope, committee members research and write about various issues included in the scope, compile a list of resources, consolidate information and create the consensus questions. The board approves the consensus questions, after which they are sent to local Leagues and MAL Units to conduct their local consensus meetings. As noted above, these responses are sent to the state committee, which compiles them and presents a report and summary to the board.

When the LWVNJ Board of Directors approves the position, it immediately becomes the League's position and is the basis for action on the issue. This type of member involvement in the consensus process tends to ensure member commitment to the resulting positions. In addition, members have the opportunity at each Convention to decide whether or not to re-adopt these positions or update them.

Timeline for the Study

Initial approval: Convention May 2, 2015

Materials and questions approved by the board: Sept 9, 2016

Materials and questions ready for distribution (after final tweaks): Sept 23, 2016

Materials sent to local Leagues, MAL Units, and ILOs: Sept 30, 2016

Deadline for consensus reports: Feb 17, 2017

NOTE: Please fill out the answers on the Word document provided with questions and email it to Melissa Smith (msmithnj@gmail.com). Copy Executive Director Jesse Burns at jburns@lwnj.org and Program Vice President Ed Gracely at Edgracely@verizon.net

Committee analyzes and prepares report for board by: March 1, 2017

Final approval and announcement of new position: Convention 2017

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study as adopted at the LWWNJ 2015 State Convention is as follows.

- First of all, to determine the types of inappropriate sexual behavior that we would want to broadly define as "sexual misconduct", "sexual assault" or "rape" for purposes of reporting requirements, victim support, policy development, legislative advocacy and enumerating preventive actions. The reason for our definition is not to compete with NJ legal terminology, but to determine **for our purposes** what we mean when we use the words "sexual misconduct", "sexual assault" or "rape".
- Secondly, we want to assess consent and determine what we think the proper formulation and requirements for acceptable consent should be.
- Following these important preliminaries, we will assess the appropriate role of local law enforcement and campus administration/campus security, federal intervention and student services in dealing with alleged sexual assault.
- We will consider and determine the most viable means of prevention (including the role of men in eliminating gender-based / sexual violence) that all campuses must implement to stop the spread of sexual assaults in New Jersey colleges.

Local Board Information

There are several roles for the local League board during the study process. The board appoints a study chair and/or committee to help educate membership and the community about the study issues or to present the study to the local members.

Then, after the consensus meeting(s) are finished and the committee prepares the consensus report, it is brought to the local board for approval before it is submitted to the state study committee. **Be sure in planning consensus meetings to allow time for this board approval before the reporting date is due.**

Guide for Discussion Leaders

A prime responsibility of the facilitator and the study committee will be to keep the discussion focused on the consensus questions and avoid distracting asides, however fascinating they may be.

Getting to Consensus

While members' insights are valuable, it is the responsibility of the facilitator(s) to keep the group focused on the consensus questions. The following are suggestions that have been found helpful in reaching this goal.

Before the consensus meeting, committee members should:

- Review the study materials at www.lwvnj.org.
- Review the PowerPoint slides.
- Make sure that the consensus questions have been reviewed and save time at the end to make sure your information is sent to your local board for review and emailed to the individuals listed above (under Timeline) as a Word document.
- Understand the ingredients of a successful meeting.
- There is a common focus on content.
- There is a common focus on process.
- The discussion leader or facilitator maintains an open and balanced conversational flow.
- Someone is aware of protecting individuals from personal attack.
- Everyone's role and responsibility are clearly defined and agreed upon.

In other words, everyone on the committee is on the same page.

Assign specific tasks to committee members.

Decide:

- who will facilitate the consensus part of the meeting if different from the presenters,
- who will be the recorder, and
- who will make sure the results of your consensus get to your LWV board for approval and for completing the form for LWVNJ

Decide how to present the study material

- Many Leagues will schedule their own informational meetings, sometimes with speakers, other times just with League members presenting, to educate their members before the full consensus meeting.
- At the consensus meeting, plan whether you will have handouts, create a Powerpoint, talk folks through the prepared materials, or otherwise. Take note that reading through a large amount of dry content is very boring. If you are presenting it, be sure to build in stories, chances for people to "test their understanding", opportunities for discussion, and so on.

Schedule a practice session prior to the presentation/consensus meeting

- Schedule a practice session for discussion leaders, recorders and facilitators. It is helpful to have an experienced League member present to help with timing and balance between background and discussion. The recorder should come away with what needs to be recorded and what to do with questions and opinions about topics not covered by the consensus questions. (Suggestion: Another sheet of chart paper labeled as "parking lot" where these may be noted for discussion at a later time.) Many Leagues with multiple units will hold training ahead of time for the unit leaders. This is very important so that the unit leaders understand the scope, are prepared for the discussion and understand the reporting procedures.
- It is important to be aware of any place where there might be a conflict and be prepared to discuss it. Copies of the local, state and national positions should be available for reference at the meetings.

Tips for Consensus Meeting

Explain the ground rules and meeting structure

The facilitator should explain the meeting ground rules at the beginning—how the meeting will be structured, how much time will be devoted to what, etc.

Review the difference between voting and consensus

Explain the difference between a majority vote and coming to consensus as the sense of the meeting. A senior League member or board member can help the facilitator explain. The time devoted to this will depend on the experience of the members participating.

The role of the discussion leader/facilitator is to make sure that:

- everyone has a copy of the agenda/program and knows what to expect,
- meeting format and ground rules are understood up front,
- members understand they have a role in the meeting/consensus, and
- everyone stays on track until the day's goal is met.

Define the recorder's role

The recorder should be at the front of the room in clear view of the members participating. It is best to record on large easel paper that can be viewed by everyone. After each question check back with the participants to make sure the consensus of the room is captured before you move on. After each section, make notes to include in the comments section. Comments are optional, not required

Ask the group's help in keeping on topic

People will usually cooperate if they understand why you must ask them to keep their comments focused. Making a note of their concern so they do not feel ignored is often helpful. Explaining up front encourages positive peer pressure.

Make sure everyone understands the materials presented

Encourage people to ask questions after the PowerPoint, if they do not understand something. This material is often complicated and the language may be unfamiliar. Asking for raised hands can help assure everyone is included. If a question cannot wait, see PowerPoint instructions for how to stop and resume the PowerPoint.

How to handle “breaking news”

Many of the issues we are discussing are currently in the news, both nationally and locally. These may distract from the work of the consensus meeting(s). Events may happen the morning of your meeting. If you are aware of them, present them up front before starting the discussion. Explain that these events, however interesting, are not a part of the consensus process.

Acknowledge the concerns and make a note for discussion at another time. This is the role of the local study committee.

If you have a “talkative group”

You know your League. If they like to talk, have trouble keeping focused or have a lot of opinions, it may be useful to have a timed agenda and a time-keeper to assist the facilitator.

The importance of the end of the meeting review

It is important to allow ten or fifteen minutes at the end of the meeting for the recorder to review the notes and reaffirm the sense of the meeting. This is reassuring to everyone that his/her thoughts have been heard.