

League of Women Voters of Texas

VOTING PROCEDURES TO INCREASE VOTING PARTICIPATION

*Vote by Mail, Election Day Registration, Election Day Centralized Voting,
Instant Runoff Voting, Internet Voting*

LEADERS GUIDE

July 2009

The Leaders Guide answers frequently asked questions to assist local League leaders conducting the state League study and concurrence with information about timeline, study materials, study background, and study and concurrence tips. Skim the questions to find the answers you need. Read the separate Concurrence Form document for instructions on how to complete and submit it. If you still need help, contact Janet Imhoff (janimhoff@tx.rr.com) or Diane Sheridan (dbsheridan@aol.com).

What is the study timing?

<u>August – December, 09</u>	Leagues hold meetings to discuss concurrence statement, section by section
<u>Jan. 22, 2010</u>	DEADLINE for each League to submit <u>one</u> concurrence form to state office
<u>March 1, 2010</u>	State board reveals results of concurrence and announces position if concurrence is reached

Where do Leagues obtain background materials and the concurrence form?

All study materials are available at www.lwvtexas.org.
Leagues without website access may request a set of materials from the state office.

What kinds of study materials are available?

Leagues may copy all materials listed below, which are on the League website.

- Leaders Guide (timeline, background and tips on study and concurrence process)
- Concurrence Form with instructions for completing and submitting form
- Facts and Issues for each main study topic:
 - Facts and Issues on Vote by Mail (VBM)
 - Facts and Issues on Election Day Registration (EDR)
 - Facts and Issues on Election Day Centralized Voting

- Facts and Issues on Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)
- Facts and Issues on Internet Voting
- Brief Summaries (handouts) for each study topic:
 - Brief Summary on Vote by Mail (VBM)
 - Brief Summary on Election Day Registration (EDR)
 - Brief Summary on Election Day Centralized Voting
 - Brief Summary on Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)
 - Brief Summary on Internet Voting
- Current LWV-Texas Position on Election Laws and Voting Rights

Additional resources:

- Texas Election Code: <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/?link=EL>
- Texas Secretary of State's website: www.sos.state.tx.us

Why is the state League studying Voting Procedures to Increase Voting Participation?

The League of Women Voters of Texas has a long held and frequently applied position on Election Laws and Voting Rights. It rests on the LWVUS Principle that every citizen should be protected in the right to vote. It is expressed in our mission of informed and active participation of citizens in government.

Characteristically, the LWV-Texas position sets out goals and criteria for examining changes to state election laws. The position lists some specific procedures but is broad enough that it may be applied to new proposals over time. The LWV-Texas Board of Directors has the responsibility to determine when a position may be applied to bring about governmental change. To make such decisions, the board must judge whether there is member understanding and agreement to support the intended action.

Five types of voting procedures with the potential to increase voter participation are emerging as issues on which LWV-Texas might wish to take action. As part of the Proposed Program for the 2008 LWV-Texas Convention, the state board recommended an update on these five topics to increase member understanding. Convention delegates asked for a member agreement process to determine how Leagues view these five kinds of voting procedure changes. (Other than this, no changes to the existing position are proposed.)

What is the study's scope and focus?

Based on the Convention 2008 decision, last summer the LWV-Texas board announced the following focus and scope for a study of Voting Procedures to Increase Voting Participation:

- Focus: An update of our Voting Rights/Election Laws position to consider various procedures to increase voter participation.

- **Scope:** The study will include, but not be limited to, a study of vote-by-mail, Internet voting, same-day registration, election-day centralized voting, overseas ballot procedures, other procedural barriers to voting, or procedures which might increase voter participation.

The study covers 5 main topics. For two of the topics, the concurrence form tests member support of more than one option.

How was the study conducted?

Under the leadership of Jayne Krawietz, LWV-Midland Area, Reed Bilz of LWV-Tarrant County, and Janet Imhoff, LWV-Texas Board, League members Charlotte Foulkes of LWV-Arlington, Patricia White of LWV-El Paso, and Renee Cross, LWV-Houston Area conducted research on five proposals with potential to increase voting participation.

Foulkes, White, and Cross wrote Facts and Issues on the five topics:

- Vote by Mail (VBM)
- Election Day Registration (EDR)
- Election Day Centralized Voting
- Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)
- Internet Voting

A brief summary of each, based on the Facts and Issues, was prepared by Diane Sheridan, LWV-Bay Area. The one-page summaries are suitable for a meeting handout or publication in the local VOTER. (The Vote by Mail summary is slightly longer.)

With what are local Leagues asked to concur?

At its July 2009 meeting, the LWV-Texas Board of Directors agreed to ask Leagues if they concur with adding the following statement to the existing position on Election Laws and Voting Rights. (No other changes to the current position are proposed.)

The League of Women Voters of Texas supports election laws that facilitate citizen participation and voter convenience, as well as voting procedures that may increase voter participation. Our support includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Statewide all-voting-by-mail system (*mandatory in all elections*)
- Unlimited access to vote-by-mail with no restrictions
- A permanent vote-by-mail list on which any voter may request to be placed
- The establishment of guidelines which would allow jurisdictions to conduct all vote-by-mail elections
- Election Day registration
- Election Day centralized voting
- Instant runoff voting
- Poll-site Internet Voting
- Remote Internet Voting

Typically, concurrence is a single yes or no vote on a concurrence statement. In this case, Leagues may concur, not concur, or indicate qualified support (could concur only if...).

Because it is possible that Leagues may support some of these emerging voting procedures and not others, the concurrence form has been separated into sections. The concurrence form asks for a response section by section.

Why it is important for Leagues to take part in the concurrence?

If member agreement results from the Voting Procedures concurrence, the position will apply statewide. The state League could take action at the state level to achieve the position, and local Leagues would be able to use at least some aspects of it to advocate local governmental change. To make the position as representative of Leagues around the state as possible, all Leagues are asked to take part in the concurrence.

How may Leagues educate members and seek concurrence?

Whatever the method, studies must expose members to balanced information on an issue. Discussion must respect the fact that members may not all have the same views. Beyond those basics, local boards decide how much time and effort their League can put into the process.

Ideally, each League would form a committee to review the study materials and brief attendees at the concurrence discussion meeting(s). Where this is not possible, Leagues might ask different members to read one of the five Facts and Issues and come to the meeting prepared to brief others. For Leagues with less time that still want to take part in the concurrence, the five Summaries may be used as handouts at the meeting to allow attendees to brief themselves as each question is discussed.

Both the Facts and Issues and the Summary describe the voting procedure and its pros and cons, exposing members to a variety of views on the issue. Whatever method is used, the discussion leader must move the discussion along but not direct members to any specific decisions about whether or not to concur.

Voting Procedures to Increase Voting Participation is a subject on which most members will enjoy expressing opinions! Discussion of the concurrence questions at a unit or general meeting is ideal because the exchange of views is part of the education process. Leagues may publish the concurrence form in the VOTER and make the study materials available to members with computer access. Leagues may seek input from members who cannot attend the meeting by allowing them to submit a concurrence form to the local board before the meeting or instead of a meeting. Think creatively about how to help members take part in this interesting study!

However a League seeks member agreement, it is the local board's responsibility to determine whether discussion or polling has resulted in concurrence in the local League. In the end, each League may submit only one, completed concurrence form to the state office. *Forms from individuals cannot be accepted.*

Instructions for submitting the form are found on the concurrence form itself.

What if we need help understanding the concurrence questions?

The concurrence questions (in *italics* below) have been excerpted from the form, with tips about where to find more information on each topic:

Question 1: Introductory statement

The League of Women Voters of Texas supports election laws that facilitate citizen participation and voter convenience, as well as voting procedures that may increase voter participation. Our support includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Tip: Don't lose discussion time with wordsmithing, but submit changes if you cannot live with the introductory statement.

Questions 2 – 5: Vote by mail (VBM)

There are four kinds of vote by mail. Your League may support any, all, or none. Tips below explain how they differ.

Voting by mail statewide (mandatory in all elections)

Tip: The Oregon model. Would apply to elections for all federal, state, and local races in Texas.

Unlimited access to vote-by-mail with no restrictions

Tip: This is no-excuse VBM, like no-excuse early voting. Instead of having to be 65 or over, out of the county on election day, etc., any registered voter could choose to vote by mail.

A permanent vote-by-mail list on which any voter may request to be placed

Tip: Instead of making a decision to vote by mail election by election, voters could sign up to vote by mail permanently.

The establishment of guidelines which would allow jurisdictions to conduct all vote-by-mail elections

Tip: Instead of requiring all elections to use vote by mail, the legislature would give jurisdictions conducting elections the authority to choose whether to conduct the election by mail.

For background, see *Facts and Issues on Vote by Mail*.

For quick reference, see *Summary on Vote by Mail (VBM)*.

Question 6: Election day registration (EDR)

For background, see *Facts and Issues on Election Day Registration*.

For quick reference, see *Summary on Election Day Registration (EDR)*.

Question 7: Election Day centralized voting

For background, see *Facts and Issues on Election Day Centralized Voting*.

For quick reference, see *Summary on Election Day Centralized Voting*.

Question 8: Instant runoff voting (IRV)

For background, see *Facts and Issues on Instant Runoff Voting*.
For quick reference, see *Summary on Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)*

Questions 9-10: Internet voting

There are two options: *Poll-site Internet voting* and *Remote Internet voting*. Your League may support either, both, or neither.

For background, see *Facts and Issues on Internet Voting*.
For quick reference, see *Summary on Internet Voting*.

See www.lwvtexas.org for the Concurrence Form.