LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® EDUCATION FUND

Election Observation Toolkit

Protecting Voters and Democracy by Shining a Light on our Elections Processes



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® EDUCATION FUND

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The League of Women Voters Education Fund gratefully acknowledges the League of Women Voters of Maine and Wisconsin, whose election observation programs and materials have been instrumental in completing this and prior versions of this toolkit. We also acknowledge our partners at The Carter Center, whose expertise provided critical context for many of the adapted training resources herein.

Chapter 1: The Basics: What is Election Observation and Why do we need it?

Why Election Observation?

A hallmark of our democracy is voters' assurance in free and fair elections. Election observing is an important part of the political process, and every election year nonprofits, political campaigns, candidates, and government agencies alike send election observers to observe different aspects of the elections process across the country – from processing voter registrations, to counting mail-in ballots, to testing machines, to undertaking recounts, to certifying the count and much more. For the League of Women Voters, election observation presents a unique opportunity to observe the election process firsthand to ensure that all eligible voters can exercise their right to vote and have their vote counted, and gather information about what's working and what's not so the process can be improved. It is also a great way for Leagues to engage new and returning volunteers and be visible in your community in a very valuable and high-profile way. With volunteer election observers observing the process, no voter will leave the polling place without knowing their rights and what steps they can take to protect their right to vote.

Election observing is necessary for many reasons. While poll workers, usually volunteers employed by local elections offices, believe in the work they are doing and are well intentioned, human bias and misinformation can create situations that will potentially disenfranchise voters. For example, with voter ID laws across the country, we have seen cases of confusion at the polls – both from official workers and voters alike. To help alleviate confusion and protect the right to vote, the League of Women Voters encourages state and local Leagues to participate in and organize election observation activities throughout the primary and general election seasons. An important first step is to learn about how election observation works in your state; use these resources from our partners at the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Carter Center. This longer guide to election observation policies (2016) also provides useful context.

With constant attacks on voters' rights, and the push from Leagues across the country to enact strong pro-voter reforms, gathering information about what happens on throughout the election process and on Election Day is crucial. Volunteer election observers are able to see firsthand the struggle some voters go through at the polls, whether it is long lines or being turned away for not providing the proper ID. These stories can be used (with permission) to promote changes to discriminatory laws, relayed in testimony, and shared with the press and supporters. Real life examples strengthen the League's work on election reforms by shedding light on the individual voters impacted by discriminatory election laws. It is important for election observers to be aware of what is happening throughout the entire election process, to promote free and fair elections.

Goals

1. Recruit, train, and place volunteers in targeted polling locations, ballot counting centers, and at other critical points throughout the election process.
2. Provide consistent training to volunteers who will document what happens at the polls on Election Day (and/or during Early Voting if applicable) or other assigned location.
3. Provide independent, nonpartisan, reliable documentation of issues related to implementation of the election laws.
4. Encourage volunteers to stay involved with their local League!
5. Work with coalition partners to develop a broad reaching effort.
6. Collect and analyze election observer's reports to develop a report on the League's findings and a set of recommendations for how to improve the election process for future advocacy.

Knowing the Observation Laws in Your State

Considering a Program? First, establish the following info for your state!

You have already researched the source of laws or rules governing elections in general in your jurisdiction, but what about those specifically governing election observers? As with everything else in elections, state laws vary as to which types of observers are permitted in the polling place and other venues, what they can observe and what they must do in order to become "accredited" observers. Your state or local election office is likely the best source of information for these questions.

- Who may observe elections?
- What, if any, is the accreditation process?

- What are the election observation rules?
- What parts of the process may be observed?
- Who does an observer report an issue to and what process do they follow?

The role of an Election Observer



Election observers are just that, observers – their role is not to interfere with the elections process but to watch and document what happens. Think of election observers as the first line of defense against disenfranchisement; election observers observe voters in the moment
and take action if necessary to ensure that the voter's rights are protected. While election observers are physically present in polling places and other locations, they are not actively participating in the process. Election observers can alert poll workers or other election officials to issues that they see (i.e. someone being turned away from the polls, discriminatory remarks, etc.) but they should not disrupt the process. Elections workers, voters and other observers alike should be observed. Of course, all volunteers with the League must remain nonpartisan and objective in all observation activities.

Points of the Election Process to Observe

Election observation does not stop and end on Election Day. Observation can occur at the local board of elections office in relation to processing voter registrations and absentee ballot requests, during early voting, at central counting locations, while machines are being tested, at vote centers, and many other points throughout the election process. The more that members are activated at these different points, the more cohesive the election observation program becomes. Not only is election observation an opportunity to see how our democracy functions, it also demands accountability from election officials. As an election observer, voters are able to see the ins and outs of how our democracy works. Lastly, becoming an election observer

cultivates relationships with poll workers and local election officials like county clerks, members of boards of elections, and election administrators.

In-person Voting

Whether in-person on Election Day or during early voting, the majority of Americans will cast their ballot in-person at a polling place. Polling places may be small single precinct locations, larger multi-precinct locations, or large vote centers. Observing the voting process when people are actively exercising their right to vote is a critical component of any election observation program. Even in states where the public is not allowed to observe the process inside polling places, significant information can be observed outside polling places.

Central Count Locations

Observation of central count locations ensures transparency in the vote counting process. Central count locations are the hubs where votes are tallied from across all voting precincts. Central count locations are also where mail-in ballots are often processed and counted. Observers can look on as vote totals are generated.

Testing of Voting Machines

It is critical that the voting machines operate accurately and effectively. Observers can be present for the testing that determines the functionality of voting machines. Each state has its own laws that protect the regulations, policies, and procedures related to the efficiency of voting machines. Depending on the state and jurisdiction, testing of the voting machines pre- and post-election may be open for observation.

Post-Election Auditing

A post-election audit occurs after the close of an election and confirms that the equipment and procedures used to count votes during an election worked properly. Discrepancies are identified by way of a hand count of paper records to ensure the correct electoral outcome. It is the process of checking paper records against the results produced by the voting system to guarantee accuracy. The requirement to have a post-election audit varies state by state but these audits are different than recounts. Audits occur regardless of margin of victory and are open to observation, based on state law.

Recounts

When the margin of victory is narrow, as prescribed by state law, or when the losing candidate of the race requests a recount, often at the expense of the candidate's campaign, recounts are held. Laws that govern the recount process vary state by state and recounts. Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia offer automatic recounts when the margin of victory between the top two candidates is within a certain range. Recounts are costly expeditions and the candidate or voter who requests the recount is responsible for costs associated with holding a recount. Recounts are open to observation, based on state law.

Canvass

A post-election canvass is a process that aggregates and confirms that all valid ballots are accurately counted and ultimately included in the certified final election results. Observers can observe this process to ensure that all ballots are counted, and official processes are followed and documented. The canvass process is often open to members of the public and the media to observe. Local elections officials can provide guidance on where, how, and when people may observe the canvass.

Election Certification Process

The certification process is the final step in the multi-prong process of post-Election Day activities. Election officials issue a report stating that the results of the election have been verified and authenticated. The statement confirms that the accuracy of the ballots has been accounted for. Through the election certification process, election officials share results that call the election and confirm winning candidates, margins of victory, and voting percentages via precinct and county-wide. Observers are permitted to watch the certification process to get a deeper understanding of each step in the process that leads up to the last step which is that the results of the election are certified. Different voting jurisdictions follow different steps of the overall certification process at their own discretion.

Election Observation as Accountability

Whether it is issuing a public comment, addressing voter accessibility concerns, or tracking election mis-and-disinformation, election observation allows for League members to get up close to on how decisions that impact voters are made. When election observers show up, they are informed, engaged, and at the ready to take a full inventory of what transpires throughout the election process. Not only does election observation deploy an active network of volunteers to monitor activities, report on issues, and make recommendations to prioritize improvements; it helps to improve trust in our elections systems across the country.

Document your efforts

Every election observer should be given an Onsite Questionnaire to fill out while at the polls or other location. This document is where the volunteer will record in writing what they observed that day – any voters being turned away, long lines, mis-handling of ballots, election interference by other voters or observers, counting irregularities, mis-handling of voter registration forms, issues with signage, machine errors, accessibility concerns, or general observations that will be helpful for the League. When permitted, election observers can also record the voting process (as long as they are at a distance so as to not record confidential information). Video or audio recordings can be helpful when the election observer believes that proof will be needed, for example when there is an argument between a voter and an election worker or even between two voters.

Election observers should be as thorough as possible when documenting the voting process and include the location, date, and time. Take clear and detailed notes that capture the totality of what is happening. For example, if a voter is turned away and leaves, the election observer should approach them once they have exited the polling place and try to A) find out why the voter was turned away B) encourage the voter to stay and vote a provisional ballot if necessary and C) collect as much information from the voter as possible (name, contact, address, etc.). This information will help the League assist the voter if possible. Collecting information on the election worker is also important but can be done after talking to the voter to ensure that no one leaves without casting a ballot. Election observers should build rapport with election workers as each of their roles are vital for voters to have a smooth and effective voting experience.

Provide Assistance to Voters

Election observers will be able to provide assistance to voters, outside the polling place, in the form of information. Staying equipped with information and facts about voting anchors election observation. If a voter is turned away without voting, the election observer can help the voter determine the appropriate and best next step, whether that is returning to the polls for another attempt or contacting the election protection hotline – 1-866-OUR-VOTE .

Election observers should have with them their state's rules regarding voting, such as the list of acceptable IDs (if needed at all) and whether or not voters can vote out of precinct. Outfitted with this information, election observers can inform voters of their rights and keep them from being disenfranchised. Observers have a keen awareness of what information is needed to vote, how best to navigate the process of voting, and an action plan if a problem arises.

While election observers should never interfere with the poll workers' job, volunteers should alert the poll worker in charge of any issues. In a non-disruptive way that does not interrupt the voting process, election observers can approach the lead poll worker. If the poll worker does not resolve the situation, the election observer can step outside of the polling place to call the main election official's office or legal counsel for further guidance.

Core Tenants of Election Observation

- Strong emphasis on protecting the right to vote
- Focus on "hot spots," or locations most likely to encounter problems
- One form per case (voters with an issue)
- Rely on direct observations
- Focused on the electoral process as a whole
- One form per location
- Dedicated to noninterference, no proactive engagement of voters
- Sampling of a variety of locations (early voting sites, vote centers, central count locations, elections officials' offices, polling places, and other locations) in order to make a comprehensive assessment of the process



Chapter 2: Best Practices to get you started

Ground Rules to Guide Your Effort

Every state has different rules concerning elections and election observation – make sure you know your state's laws before training League members and volunteers. In general, though, the same best practices will most likely apply nationwide.

- Let the lead election worker know you have arrived – ask where to stand if not obvious
- Follow their instructions and direct questions to her/him
- Remain in the designated election observation area
- Provide photo identification
- Wear name tag and/or badge at the location
- Don't be disruptive – take phone calls outside, stand/sit to the side
- No electioneering of any kind
- Bring snacks/water
- Bring a notebook, multiple pens, cell phone, and cell phone charger
- If your state has photo ID laws, bring a list of acceptable forms as a reference
- Save all important phone numbers in your phone BEFORE you get to the polls
- Speak to the election worker in charge first to address concerns
- Do not escalate the situation – if they are not responsive, call the main election office or the Election Protection hotline
- Do not interfere with the voting process
- If someone is turned away from the polls, approach them outside the polling place and get details but most importantly: *Don't let them leave without voting!*
- Remember: *Election workers are volunteers, too!*
- They have good intentions but might have wrong information/ assumptions.

Election Observers Shouldn't Do the Following:

- Record content in the polling locations, except where/when allowed
- Handle election documents
- Talk about candidates, ballot initiatives, or political campaigns/parties
- Make calls from cell phones inside a polling place (texting is usually acceptable, if it is not disruptive)
- Wear buttons or clothing that promotes a candidate, campaign, or political party
- Interact with voters inside a polling place
- View confidential information on the polling list

Establishing your Core Team

An election observation program is most successful when there is a strong relationship between the observing group and local election officials. Get to know your local election official well ahead of the election and emphasize that you would like to play a collaborative role in the election process. Schedule a meeting with your local board of elections to get to know your official and their team. Take the time to learn about the processes and procedures that the election official has in place. Any recommendations that you will provide after the election will be better received by the election official if they come from a place of trust and mutual understanding between you and the official. There is a document in this toolkit with suggested questions to ask your election official.

- Develop concept and work plan for implementing an election observation program. Work with coalition partners to develop a broad reaching effort.
- Conduct research on the local election administration environment and any state or local issues that should be observed more in depth.
- Make connections with local election officials.
- Recruit, train, and place volunteers in targeted locations.
- Collect and analyze election observer's reports to develop a report on the League's findings and a set of recommendations for how to improve the process for future advocacy.
- Develop a plan for post-election presentation/outreach of final report, findings, or recommendations.

Creating your Program

A statewide or local election observation program is a fantastic way to engage League members in a new way, while at the same time recruit non-members and supporters to be active in their

communities. Crafting an observing program that is efficient, adept, and comprised of knowledgeable Leaguers will serve as a model for other organizations and civic groups to build observation efforts.

Every state has different laws for conducting elections, from polling hours of operation to what forms of ID are necessary. Before you can begin training volunteers, find out your state's rules from your local election officials. Months before the election, plan a meeting with elections officials. Bring your list of questions and ask for copies of their handbooks and internal guidance if possible. Get to know staff at your local board of elections so you can activate them as a resource when additional information is needed.

In order to train your team, make sure you have the facts about how election decisions are being made in your area. Be aware of any recent changes to election procedures and focus on these changes when training your team. Ask questions and engage thoroughly to raise your acumen on voting and elections:

- Elections are usually run at the county/municipal level
- The roles and responsibilities of the state election office vary by state
- Who is in charge of elections in your jurisdiction?
- What laws and administrative rules govern elections in your jurisdiction?
- What resources does your local election official provide to learn more about elections in your area?
- Voter registration deadlines and options
- Early voting
- Voting on Election Day protocol
- Absentee or Vote-by-Mail options
- Voting technology
- Voter ID requirements and acceptable forms of ID for voters
- Polling place locations and hours of operations

Election Day is Now Election Season

Thanks to ever-changing voting options, timeframes and processes, many states now have overlapping processes for voter registration, mail/absentee voting, early voting and election day preparation. Vote counting and certification processes add another layer of complexity. These partners have also created an additional resource detailing observation practices before, during and after Election Day in your state.

Make a plan

Election Day and the days before and after can be chaotic, so having a plan in place will help your League stay organized. Gathering all Election Observer Forms from volunteers is crucial for League's to use and digest the observations made at the polls. Volunteers should have clear instructions on how to return all documentation, whether by email, in person or even in the mail. Depending on what part of the process had an issue and what happened, some documents may be more time sensitive. For example, if an election observer has a long list of voters who vote provisional ballots and need to return with the accepted ID for their vote to count, the League will want that list as soon as possible to help reach out to provisional voters. Letting all volunteers know ahead of Election Day where to return forms is crucial to ensuring your League has all the information that you need.

In addition to thinking through the physical data collection, make a plan for how the data will be stored and accessed for later use. Does your League have a central database? Who will record the information electronically? Where will the physical copies be stored? Who will have access to the information? How will the League gather information from coalition partners or share the information the League collected? Answering these questions ahead of time will make your post-election activities run much smoother!

Volunteer Recruitment

Follow this sample timeline to ensure your volunteer team is formed, trained, and prepped for a successful election observation operation! This sample is for a spring election (source: LWV Wisconsin):

- Jan 7 - First invite to previous volunteers (3 months out)
- Jan 21 - Second invite to previous volunteers (2 weeks later)
- Jan 22 - Invite to supporters who have never volunteered (next day)
- Jan 22 - Ask partners to help recruit volunteers (same day)
- Feb 3 - 2nd ask for partners to help recruit volunteers (2 months out)
- Week of March 8 - Deadline to finalize volunteer packet (month before)
- Week of March 8 - Match volunteers to polling sites (month before)
- March 12 - Cut off volunteer registration and send training packets to printer
- Week of March 16 - mail training packets (3 weeks before)
- Week of March 22 - webinar training (2 weeks before)
- April 7 - Election Day

Determine key locations

With so many locations across each state (or community), recruiting volunteers for each site will be impossible. Instead, focus on key factors to determine which locations will best be served by League volunteers. Working from past data (from word of mouth or coalition partners) determine the precincts, vote centers, and central count locations that are most at risk for irregularities. Some factors to consider: majority black/BIPOC districts, precincts known to have Election Day issues (such as long lines or opening the polls late), and areas with high student populations.

Think through the dynamics of your state and what, if any, laws have been recently changed regarding elections. Each state will have specific challenges and considerations – and the League is uniquely qualified to determine the areas of focus because of the hard work we do every year to support fair and accessible elections.

- Sending volunteers to precincts with above average turnout would be helpful so that the League can ensure that no voters leave before casting a ballot, and everyone is in fact allowed to vote.
- With many states undergoing changes to election processes (including cuts to early voting, changes to same day registration, rules for out of precinct voting, and new ID laws), precincts with large numbers of affected voters are critical to reach. To determine where the greatest impact might be, Leagues can look to data on which groups were most impacted by the laws (who used same day registration, for example) and focus on precincts with great populations of the impacted communities.
- With challenges to the certification process on the rise, Leagues should consider prioritizing those communities with past challenges, slim margins of victory, active disinformation campaigns, or with large numbers of voters potentially targeted for purging.

As much as you want to fill your top priorities first, however, sometimes that will not be possible. For example, if there is a volunteer who does not live close to a priority location you may need to find a location closer to them. Make sure you are flexible enough in your plans to accommodate all volunteers – each person who wants to help should be given a role!

Develop a Schedule

Before actively recruiting volunteers, the state or local League should create an election observing schedule. This would include activities before Election Day, including early voting and

other processes, on Election Day, post-election processes, including counting and certification. Use this schedule to place volunteers in your priority locations first. Creating a schedule will also allow you to see exactly how many volunteers you will need to recruit. Remember, early voting and Election Day are long – you will probably need 2-3 people to cover 1 polling place (if people will be taking breaks). When trying to cover as many places as possible with limited volunteers, ask people to observe the polls during the busiest hours, before and after work, or during lunch hours.

Time to recruit!

Local Leagues will have the best resources and knowledge for what goes into managing the electoral process in their community, where volunteers are most needed, and even who the volunteer election observers are each year. An election observation program is a way to recruit new members or involve members who have not been as active and build partnerships. Election observation is also a great way to engage with the community, promoting the work the League does year-round while protecting the rights of voters through observing and documenting the voting process. Leagues across the country advocate year-round for voter reforms and protecting the right to vote, and election observation is the last line of defense to ensure that no voter is disenfranchised.

- Incentivize the program – Work on creative ideas to get local Leagues involved in election observation. Tie in their local community work with the need to be present at the polls.
- LWV Badges/shirts – Have volunteers make badges or t-shirts that display to all voters the local League's name. This helps voters and election workers identify who you are while promoting the League in a non-disruptive way. Be sure you know in advance if your elections officials allow you to display the League logo/name.
- An election observation program is one of the best ways to educate the public on changes to voting laws while at the same time providing a crucial service. While observing the voting process, League members and volunteers can have nonpartisan election information available for voters who are confused or stopped from voting. Providing this information strengthens the League's connection within the community.
- Ask members to recruit friends, family, and neighbors – This might seem like a no-brainer (and Leagues do this all the time for general membership and events), but some people who would never think to register voters or come to a meeting might be willing to observe the election process, especially at their polling place before or after they cast their own vote.

- Reach into wide and unlikely networks to bring in volunteers by asking members to go through their personal contacts. Election observation is an easy, but incredibly important job that appeals to people with limited volunteering time. Have members think about people who have great attention to detail, patience, and the ability to sit for extended periods of time.
- Social media – Use local and statewide Facebook, X, BlueSky, Instagram, League websites and email lists to send out information about election observing. Make it as easy as possible for volunteers to sign up. Trainings – schedule statewide webinars/conference calls as well as in-person trainings hosted by local Leagues. Make it as easy as possible for volunteers to get the information and resources they need. Often states will have training guidelines available that you will want to make available to any League volunteers. Trainings are a great way to bring new potential members into the League and encourage them to take the next step to becoming members.
- Make an Election Day (and Early Voting or other specific activities) event on Facebook or Eventbrite. You can also schedule trainings with all of the details for volunteers. Using an online platform also allows members to share your events with non-members who might be interested in volunteering but have not liked your page.
- Include sign-ups and information in your League updates/newsletters and on your website. Again, make sure all members and supporters know where to find information on election observation and any trainings you will offer. Encourage members and supporters to share all information with their networks – League in Action is a great tool to support this.

Chapter 3: Team Training Must-Haves

Training your Team

As with any new League program, you'll want to train your team to ensure any observers representing the League are conducting their work in a consistent, nonpartisan manner.

This great training video from the League of Women Voters of Maine demonstrates the kinds of topics you'll want to cover in your volunteer trainings. In 2020, LWVME trained over 100 volunteers to observe elections in 163 key jurisdictions.

Training Scenarios: Real Life Examples

Another key way to prepare your team is to walk through real-life examples they're likely to encounter at their assigned locations. Here are a few scenarios shared by our experienced state League observers:

If your state DOES NOT have a voter photo ID requirement

- *Someone comes in to vote and is asked for photo ID by an election worker*. Document everything, alert the voter to their rights if they leave without voting. Talk to the election worker in charge. Call the lawyers if necessary.
- *Someone comes in to vote and asks to have their ID checked*. Again, document everything. Make sure the election workers alert the voter that no ID is necessary. The election worker should not check the voter's ID.
- *Another election observer tells the election worker in charge that IDs should be required to vote that day.* Listen to the conversation – the election worker in charge should clarify that nothing is required. Make sure to document the conversation and observe voters to ensure that no IDs are asked for.

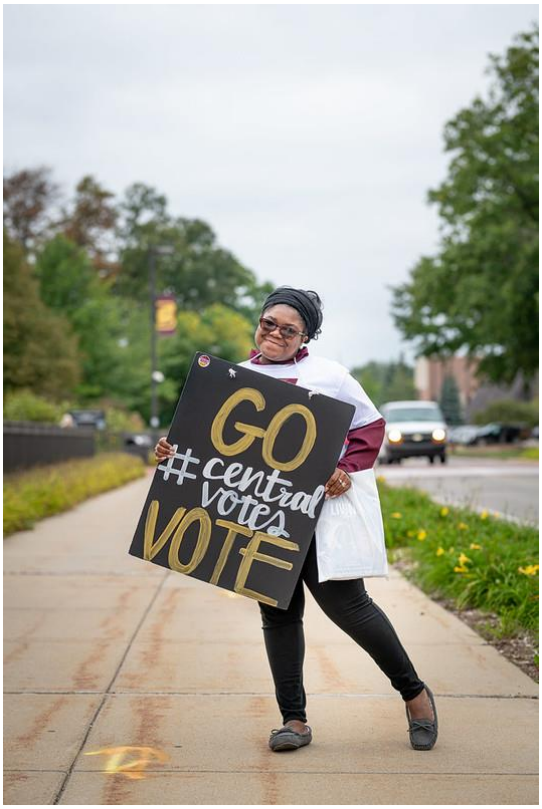
If your state DOES have a voter photo ID requirement

- *The voter shows a valid form of ID and the election worker makes the voter cast a provisional ballot.* Do not interfere with the voting process, but alert the election worker in charge. Make sure they let the election workers know all acceptable forms of ID. The voter should not have to vote provisionally.
- *The election worker asks the voter for additional forms of ID when only 1 is required.* Document the situation and ensure that the voter is indeed able to vote. Make sure the election worker in charge knows that only 1 ID is required and alerts everyone else. Call the lawyers if necessary. Collect the voter's contact information and encourage them to also call the lawyers if they are forced to vote on a provisional ballot.

Other Examples

- *Someone challenges a voter's right to vote.* Document how the issue is handled. Make sure the voter knows their rights if they leave without voting. Alert the election worker in charge. Do not confront the challenger directly – that is the election worker's job. Call the lawyers if necessary. Like all election rules, who may challenge a voter's eligibility and when, varies by state.

- *Other election observers challenge actions or decisions of the election worker in charge*. Document how this is handled, if needed contact the lawyers you are working with or the Election Protection Hotline (1-866-OUR-VOTE).
- *Someone is asked to sign the poll book and is unable to do so and they are not allowed to vote.* Document and inform the election worker in charge. Voters with disabilities should be assisted – everyone has the right to cast their ballot.
- *The polling location is not ADA compliant, preventing some voters with disabilities from casting a ballot.* Alert the election worker in charge. If the issue is not resolved, contact the lawyers or the Election Protection Hotline. Record all contact information from the voter.
- *You hear a voter or election worker making discriminatory comments.* Alert the election worker in charge. Every eligible voter at the polling location has the right to vote and should not feel intimidated while they are there. Document the situation.
- *A voter left political materials in the voting booth.* If you see a voter walk in with a stack of papers and leave with nothing, ask the election worker in charge to check their booth. Make sure all materials are thrown in the trash.
- *Long lines have formed and the polls are now closed. Voters are disgruntled about the long wait, and some people start to leave. Election workers try to tell voters at the end of the line that the polls have already closed.* Hold the lines! Talk to the people at the end of the line and make sure they know their rights – as long as they were inside the polling location (or in line) before polls closed, they have the right to vote. Encourage them to stay. Make sure no one is turned away by election workers, and if so, encourage that voter to stay. Alert the lawyers and the election worker in charge if people are being turned away.



Collecting Follow-up Information from Voters

Train your team to collect voter contact information when anyone is turned away, anyone is issued a provisional ballot, or a voter has a bad experience that may require follow up. You should talk to voters and collect their information once they are outside of the polling place. Do not tell election workers what they *should or should not do* – instead, alert them to the laws and the situations you have observed. We do not want to put anyone on the defense. Most election workers are volunteering their time because they believe in voting – they just might not know the specifics of the law*!*

Sample Training Quiz: Dealing with Common Issues

Question	Your state does not have a photo voter ID requirement, but an election worker asks a voter to provide a photo ID. What do you do? Check all that apply.
Answer	✅ Document the incident.

	✓ Talk to the election worker in charge in a non-confrontational manner. Angrily confront the lead election worker. ✓ Alert the voter to his or her right to vote.
Correct Feedback	Correct! Document the incident, talk to the election worker in charge in a non-confrontational manner, and alert the voter that he or she is still able to vote.
Incorrect Feedback	I'm sorry, that's incorrect. You should not angrily confront the lead election worker. Instead, document the incident, talk to the election worker in charge in a non-confrontational manner, and alert the voter that he or she is still able to vote.

Question	Your state does not have a voter photo ID requirement. A voter comes in and shows a valid form of ID but the election worker makes the voter cast a provisional ballot. What do you do? Check all that apply.
Answer	Step in and demand that the voter be given a regular ballot. ✓ Do not interfere with the voting process, but alert the election worker in charge. ✓ Make sure election workers are aware of all acceptable forms of ID. Demand to speak to the official in charge of elections in the jurisdiction to complain.
Correct Feedback	Correct! Do not interfere with the voting process, but alert the election worker in charge. Make sure election workers are aware of all acceptable forms of ID. The voter should not have to vote provisionally.
Incorrect Feedback	That's incorrect. You should not interfere with the voting process or speak angrily with election officials, instead, alert the election worker in charge. Make sure election workers are aware of all acceptable forms of ID. The voter should not have to vote provisionally.

Question	An election worker asks a voter for additional forms of ID, when only one form is required. What do you do? Check all that apply.
Answer	Loudly accuse election workers of not following procedures.
	✓ Document the incident.
	✓ Ensure that the voter is indeed able to vote.
	✓ Speak with the election worker in charge.
Correct Feedback	Correct! You should document the incident, ensure that the voter is able to vote, and calmly bring the matter to the attention of the lead election worker.
Incorrect Feedback	Incorrect. You should document the incident, ensure that the voter is able to vote, and calmly bring the matter to the attention of the head election worker.

Question	Someone other than an election worker challenges a voter's right to vote. What do you do? Check all that apply.
Answer	✓ Document how the issue is handled.
	Confront the challenger directly.
	✓ Make sure the voter knows that he or she can vote on a provisional ballot.
	✓ Speak with the election worker in charge.
Correct Feedback	Correct! You should document how the issue was handled, make sure the voter knows he or she is able to cast a provisional ballot, and speak with the head election worker. Do not confront the challenger directly.
Incorrect Feedback	Incorrect. Do not confront the challenger directly. You should document how the issue was handled, make sure the voter knows he or she is able to cast a provisional ballot, and speak with the head election worker.

Chapter 4: Working with partners & the media

Working with community partners

In some states, the majority of organizing work is also being done by other elections/voting rights nonprofit organizations. If your League has worked with these organizations before, or if individual members have, coalition partners are a perfect way to reach more people by collaborating on efforts. No one wants to show up to an assigned location only to find out a partner organization has already sent a volunteer to observe the process there! Check with coalition partners to determine what is already being done, and where, and how you all can work together to make your state that much stronger. Here are a few key concepts to consider:

- Research other organizations in your area that plan to observe elections, and request a meeting to share plans
- Coordinate your efforts
- Think about a shared training for observers
- Share data and "turf" – are there areas that no one is covering?
- What recognition will the League get for doing this work?
- If a great program already exists, plug into it instead of starting from scratch!

More than likely, you have been working with strong partners for years who may have launched election observation programs. Coordinating efforts is key to ensuring that the rights of as many voters as possible are protected.

After the Election: Collecting Feedback and Tweaking your Program

Feedback is the best way to evaluate your program and make adjustments or improvements for the next election. All volunteers should be asked how they felt about election observing and for advice. To help get a higher response rate from volunteers, attach an evaluation form to their election observation documents. This way each volunteer can fill out the form and send it back along with their data.

Collecting feedback is the first step – discussing all positive and negative feedback with election observation organizers is key to improving the program in the future. Set a time a few weeks or months after the election to go through every evaluation form. Anyone who participated in the planning of your program should have a chance to read the evaluations and the option of being present at the discussion. Based on feedback, determine next steps and action items that your League can take for the next election.

Volunteer election observers, both members and non-members, can be plugged in to local and state League activities shortly after the campaign. Reaching out to these volunteers within a few days or a week of the election to personally thank them is a good first step. Most of these volunteers will be excited to talk about their experiences and share their thoughts, and even frustrations, about their election observation assignment(s). Encourage Leagues to be creative when plugging these volunteers into local activities.

- Provide volunteers with the opportunity to write guest blog posts on their election observation experience. These can be shared on your website and social media, or even through action alerts. All posts, of course, should be reviewed by the League first.
- Invite election observation volunteers to speak for 3-5 minutes about their experience at your next meeting. Hopefully, they can inspire other League members to become election observers for the next election.
- Does your state have election laws that disenfranchise voters? Encourage election observers to write letters to the editor sharing their firsthand experience observing discrimination at the polls. Make sure no election observer divulges confidential voter information, but instead uses specific stories in a way that can educate the public about the harmful effects of bad election laws.
- Ask election observers to create their own group or committee to organize the efforts for the next election. Build on their personal experience and knowledge to have them recruit others, as well as come up with a schedule and training events.
- Sign up any non-members to join their local Leagues! Hopefully, any non-members who volunteered with the League will be inspired to stay active and get involved. A great way to bring the voting process full circle is to ask election observation volunteers to help out with a local voter registration drive.

Amplifying Your Election Observation Program

Tips for Social Media and Traditional Media

SOCIAL MEDIA

Basic social media best practices: photos, gifs, shortened links (bitly.com), use the same hashtag, tweet at influencers and active political pundits in your state, tag volunteers in photos or posts.

Before

- Internal – build list of influencers you will tweet at about your activities, develop a basic framework for how you will use social media to amplify the work you are doing and recruit volunteers
- Before content: Photos of volunteers doing things to get ready for election observation, recruitment links, etc.

During

- During content: Updates on where Leagues will be observing, photos of volunteers in action

After

- Post thank-you messages to election observation volunteers
- Post pictures from your program
- Post basic findings from your work, post an abbreviated report

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

How will you share your findings with traditional media outlets – papers, online news sources, local TV etc.? Think about creating a media-facing version of your post-election report – they don't need the whole thing, just need the most important toplines. Encourage election observers to write a letter to the editor chronicling their experience. A letter to the editor or an op-ed serves as a way to document and share the process of observing and can be useful in recruiting others to become election observers.

Chapter 5: Reporting your results

Plan to prepare a post-election report in a timely manner following your effort. Publishing your results are critical to a) advocating for needed change, b) increasing interest in your election observation program for the future and c) expanding the League's influence.

The following guiding principles can help you prepare a winning report:

1. Ensure your report includes recommendations that are:
   - **S**pecific
   - **M**easurable
   - **A**ttainable
   - **R**elevant
   - **T**ime-Bound

2. Keep your Recommendations clear and concise:
   - Direct each recommendation to a clear stakeholder/decisionmaker (i.e., "To the Secretary of State's Office" or "To the Election Officials of America County.")
   - Limit the number of recommendations that you make. Don't try to mention every single thing that was observed – prioritize the most important recommendations.
3. Craft recommendations carefully. Ideally this will be the beginning of a productive working relationship with election officials in your jurisdiction. Although you want to help improve the process, you also don't want to burn any bridges.
4. Generally, the report will include:
   - Executive Summary
   - Background Information
   - Trends Observed Pre-Election, including Early Voting (if applicable)
   - Trends Observed on Election Day
   - Trends Observed Post-Election
   - Conclusions and Recommendations
5. A report issued soon after the election will often have a greater impact in the media. You may want to issue a preliminary statement soon after the election, and a more detailed report in the weeks and months following the election.

Additional Resources

LWVWI Poll Observer Program Guides – Real Life Examples, Questions for Election Officials and Election Observer forms have been partially adapted from League of Women Voters of Wisconsin 2012 Convention Caucus, which can be found on the League Management site.

League of Women Voters of Maine Election Observation Training

Policies for Election Observers – including a state-by-state on who can observe the election process (2024, National Conference of State Legislatures)

Nonpartisan Election Observation (2024, Carter Center)

Challenges to Voter Eligibility – including a state-by-state guide on who can challenge voters and on what grounds (2024, National Conference of State Legislatures)

Guide to Election Observation Policies (2016, Carter Center)

Appendix A: Sample Polling Place Observation Form (ideally provided via a mobile platform!)

A. Date and Time

A1	Date	Click or tap to enter a date.
A2	Time of arrival	Click or tap here to enter text.
A3	Time of departure	Click or tap here to enter text.

B. Team Information

B1	Team Number	Click or tap here to enter text.
B2	Volunteer Observer Names	Click or tap here to enter text.
B3	Volunteer Observer Phone/Email	Click or tap here to enter text.

C. Polling Place Information

C1	Polling place name	Click or tap here to enter text.
C2	Polling place address	Click or tap here to enter text.
C3	How many precincts are there in the polling place?	Click or tap here to enter text.
C4	Precinct numbers	Click or tap here to enter text.
C5	Type of location	Choose an item.
C6	Type of community/neighborhood	Choose an item.
C7	Number of registered voters at the polling place	Click or tap here to enter text.
C8	Voting equipment/method of voting	Choose an item.

D. Polling Place Environment

D1	At the time of opening, were there long lines of voters waiting outside of the polling place?	Yes ☐ No ☐
	Estimate how many voters were waiting in line at the polling place….	

D2	… at the time of opening	Click or tap here to enter text.
D3	… at 8:00 am	Click or tap here to enter text.
D4	… at 10:00 am	Click or tap here to enter text.
D5	… at noon	Click or tap here to enter text.
D6	… at 2:00 pm	Click or tap here to enter text.
D7	… at 5:00 pm	Click or tap here to enter text.
D8	… at the time of closing	Click or tap here to enter text.
D9	Did poll workers efficiently manage/control the lines?	Yes ☐ No ☐
D10	How many people left before voting because of the long line?	Click or tap here to enter text.
D11	Were there any unusual incidents near the polling place during the day that may have impacted voting? Please describe.	Click or tap here to enter text.
D12	Was campaign material present near the polling place (within the established limit)?	Yes ☐ No ☐
D13	Were campaign activities taking place near the polling place at any point during the day (within the established limit)?	Yes ☐ No ☐
D14	Was there a visible presence of police or security personnel outside the polling place?	Yes ☐ No ☐
D15	Did anyone report intimidation at the polling place? If so, what was the cause?	Yes ☐ No ☐ Choose an item.

E. Opening

E1	Did the polling place open on time? If no, delay was: If no, opening was delayed because of:	Yes ☐ No ☐ Choose an item. Choose an item.
E2	Were there any other procedural issues at opening? If so, please describe	Yes ☐ No ☐ Click or tap here to enter text.

F. Accessibility

F1	Was the polling place accessible for voters with reduced mobility or other disabilities?	Yes ☐ No ☐

F2	Was appropriate assistance provided to voters when needed?	Yes ☐ No ☐
F3	Were there sufficient accessible voting devices available?	Yes ☐ No ☐
F4	Did poll workers know how to use the accessible voting devices?	Yes ☐ No ☐
F7	Describe any other issues voters with disabilities experienced.	Click or tap here to enter text.

G. Public Information

G1	Were election materials, including ballots, available in the languages required by law?	Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐
G2	Were voting instructions posted in a visible location?	Yes ☐ No ☐
G3	Was there a map of the voting location relative to other polling places posted?	Yes ☐ No ☐
G4	Was the voter list posted for public scrutiny?	Yes ☐ No ☐

H. Voters

H1	How many confused voters did you observe due to inadequate signage?	Click or tap here to enter text.
H2	How many voters did you observe that were sent to the wrong polling place?	Click or tap here to enter text.
H3	How did poll workers handle confused voters?	Click or tap here to enter text.
	How many voters were unable to cast a ballot due to…	
H4	… no acceptable ID	Click or tap here to enter text.
H5	… not on the voter list	Click or tap here to enter text.
H6	… poll worker insisted on a certain type of ID, even though not required by law	Click or tap here to enter text.
H7	… name on voter list didn't match name on ID	Click or tap here to enter text.
H8	… name on voter list not correct	Click or tap here to enter text.
H9	… voter not able to get needed assistance	Click or tap here to enter text.
H10	How many voters left the polling place without voting?	Click or tap here to enter text.

H11	Were provisional ballots given appropriately (per applicable rules)?	Yes ☐ No ☐
H12	Were voters given instructions on how to follow up after casting a provisional ballot?	Yes ☐ No ☐
	How many voters had voted at the polling place…	
H13	… by 8:00 am	Click or tap here to enter text.
H14	… by 10:00 am	Click or tap here to enter text.
H15	… by noon	Click or tap here to enter text.
H16	… by 2:00 pm	Click or tap here to enter text.
H17	… by 5:00 pm	Click or tap here to enter text.
H18	… by the time of closing	Click or tap here to enter text.

I. Voting Equipment

I1	Was voting equipment functioning properly throughout the day?	Yes ☐ No ☐
I2	Were instructions for using voting equipment posted in a visible location?	Yes ☐ No ☐
I3	If paper ballots were being used, did the polling place run out of ballots?	Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A ☐
I4	Was the privacy of a voter or the secrecy of the ballot ever compromised?	Yes ☐ No ☐
I5	Did you observe any voters unable to complete the voting process?	Yes ☐ No ☐
I6	Describe any issues, malfunctions or observed problems with the voting equipment.	Click or tap here to enter text.

J. Poll Workers

J1	Were there enough poll workers at the polling place for it to function properly?	Yes ☐ No ☐
J2	Did poll workers appear to be adequately trained?	Yes ☐ No ☐
J3	Were there any instances of poll workers providing incorrect information to voters?	Yes ☐ No ☐
J4	How cooperative were poll workers with you during the day?	Choose an item.

J5	Describe any poll worker issues you observed.	Click or tap here to enter text.

K. Closing

K1	Were there voters waiting in line at the time of closing? If yes, were they allowed to vote?	Yes ☐ No ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐
K2	At what time did the last voter cast a ballot?	Click or tap here to enter text.

Appendix B: Sample Election Observation Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct for Election Observation

- Respect the laws of the jurisdiction and the authority of election officials.
- Follow the instructions of election officials.
- Respect the laws and procedures in place for election observers, including providing appropriate identification when necessary.
- Respect and protect the integrity of the election observation program by acting appropriately, listening to instructions, and reporting any conflicts of interests or improper behavior.
- When possible, observe all aspects and stages of the electoral process to make a credible assessment of the election.
- Maintain a constructive relationship with election authorities and other stakeholders.
- Do not intervene to correct or influence election process. If problems are observed, bring them to the attention of election officials.
- Ask questions of election officials, political party representatives or voters, but do so in a way that does not obstruct or direct the process.
- Do not ask voters how they voted.
- Be impartial. Do not express or exhibit any bias or preference to political parties, candidates, or issues.
- Do not conduct any activity that could be perceived as favoring a party or candidate.
- Be independent in findings and conclusions.
- Base findings on first-hand observation.
- Make accurate, comprehensive observations that note both positive and negative factors.
- Keep detailed records about observations, where they were made, and other relevant information.
- When drawing conclusions, distinguish between significant and insignificant factors to the election process.
- Base conclusions on factual and verifiable evidence.
- Volunteer observers should refrain from making comments to the public or the media.
- Cooperate with other election observation groups.

- Pledge to follow this Code of Conduct

Every person who participates in this election observation program must read and understand this Code of Conduct and sign a pledge to follow it.

Observer Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Optional Additional Volunteer Observation Questions

Accessibility

1. Is parking available near or close to the building?

2. If there's a parking lot, is it paved?

3. Is there an accessible parking space(s) clearly marked with the standard accessible parking sign?

4. If yes, is the accessible parking space(s) located nearest to the accessible entrance?

5. If the polling place does NOT have a parking lot, is there an accessible passenger drop-off area?

6. Is there obvious signage outside of the polling location?

7. Is the path of travel into the building free of breaks and edges and clear of debris (snow, ice, leaves, etc.) and low hanging objects (ex. Tree branches)?

8. Is the main entrance to the building free of steps or have a ramp or elevator?

9. Is there an alternate accessible entrance that is clearly marked?

Drop Box Reporting Questions:

1. Are voters able to access the drop box?

2. Is the drop box clearly labeled?

3. Was the drop box easy to locate?

4. Is there someone staffing the drop box to serve as a witness?

5. Does the drop box look secure?

6. When will the last pick up of absentee ballots in the drop box be?

Appendix D: Applying a DEI Lens to your program

A DEI lens is a way of examining a program, a process, a product, etc. with regards to how it is perceived by a variety of communities, voices, and perspectives, and what, if any, barriers may exist that is preventing it from being equitable or inclusive of everyone.

What To Ask When Examining Your Work Through a DEI Lens

- Who is involved in the process?
    - Are key stakeholders meaningfully included?
    - Is this work that impacts a group or community? If so, is their voice represented?
    - How diverse is the group of decision makers? Is it diverse enough?
- Who will be impacted?
    - Who benefits from this?
    - Who is burdened by this?
    - Does this help us meet the needs of underserved voters?
    - Have we considered various, specific marginalized groups and how they might be impacted?
- What are the intended and unintended outcomes?
    - What issue are we trying to solve?
    - What do we hope will happen?
    - What are the potential negative impacts? Who could be hurt by this?
    - What data or evidence supports this?
    - How might this be perceived by others?
- Does this align with our vision for an equitable and inclusive organization?
    - How is equity addressed?
    - What barriers might this place in the way of achieving equity?
    - How does this impact the League's culture?
- What changes could be made to make this more equitable?
    - What are the short term goals?

- What are the long term goals?
- What, if any, policies, or bylaws need to be added or amended?
- What are the benefits for members?
- What are the benefits for partners and/or members of the community?

Continue your journey by checking out additional resources below!

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Guide Intro
- LWV Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy
- Past LWVUS diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings and other resources