

Guidance for Leagues about Nonpartisanship and Partnerships From its founding in 1920, the League made the choice to neither support nor oppose any political party or candidate for public office. This foundation of nonpartisanship continues today to ensure that the League's voice is heard above the tumult of party/partisan politics and has added strength to the League's positions on issues and has made possible wide acceptance of League voter service and other educational activities. It is important to recognize that while the League's activities to influence public policy are not partisan by default, the public's understanding and perception of partisanship changes throughout history and is directly impacted by current events as well as geographic and regional dynamics. Additionally, those who oppose the reforms and issues the League is working on may claim the League's efforts are partisan to control how the League exercises its influence and power. **This does not mean the League should curtail its advocacy or limit the public policy issues it works to influence, but rather be mindful of the external environment when deciding how, when, and with whom to engage in public policy activities.**

This is especially true as Leagues evaluate whether, and how, to partner with different organizations. Working in partnership with other groups through formal coalitions (large or small), or to plan one event or activity is an effective way to build power and use resources to work on an issue. When considering a partnership, it's critical to first determine how the partnership will help advance the League's goals. However, Leagues are sometimes concerned that the groups they work with may eventually endorse candidates or be perceived in support of a candidate or political party. This should not stop the League from working with a group or groups that it might otherwise join or collaborate with, but it is important to think through the League's policy of not supporting or opposing candidates for political office when making those decisions. There is no one size fits all answer to these issues.

It is up to each League board to evaluate the conditions of its League, as well as the political climate and traditions in its community. It is also up to each League board to determine the risks of partnering with an organization and the impact of that partnership on their work.

Defining Partnerships: A partnership can take different forms and look a variety of ways. The most common forms of League partnerships are:

1. Planning or hosting events together, such as voter registration drives, educational forums, or candidate forums.
2. Joining formal coalitions that focus on advancing one or more League goals or priorities at the local, state, and national level.
3. Informal/ad hoc relationships in which League leaders may: attend another organization's event; speak at a press conference or rally; invite an organization to speak at a League sponsored event; or speak at another organization's event.

4. While most partnerships and coalitions may not require a formal agreement or memo of understanding/principles document, some might. LWVUS recommends putting in writing an agreement any time financial or other significant resources are being shared between organizations.

What questions should a League ask when considering partnerships:

1. How will this opportunity help the League reach its organizational, strategic, and operational goals?
2. Does this opportunity help the League realize its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice?
3. If it doesn't directly serve our goals or fill an existing gap, is it still worth doing for other reasons?
4. Who is missing from the coalition that should be at the table?
5. Does this partnership bring increased visibility or revenue possibilities to our League?
6. What specific added value can we offer this potential partner?
7. How do our values and priorities align with this partner?
8. Will this partnership directly benefit or engage our target audiences and/or underrepresented communities?
9. What is the commitment being asked of the League in terms of time and other resources? Is what they're asking of us reasonable and doable for our League?
10. What does our League need from the relationship to make this worth our while?
11. Is this potential partnership with a PAC, c3, c4, etc? How might that shape the nature of their work and the intention for partnering with the League?
12. How does this partnership align with our commitment to our public policy positions?
13. What, if anything, is stipulated in our state or local League bylaws or organizational policies that pertain to partnerships?
14. What doors would this partnership open for our League? Would this partnership close any doors for our League?
15. Are there partisan organizations involved and if so, is there a political balance within the coalition? Is the coalition large enough and balanced with enough other nonpartisan organizations?
16. Will the coalition as a whole or individual organizations within the coalition be endorsing candidates?
17. What are the risks in relation to foregoing the partnership vs. joining the partnership?

Frequently asked questions about nonpartisan partnerships:

1. Does the fact that an organization endorses or opposes a political party or candidate mean our League cannot partner with them? LWVUS does not prohibit Leagues from partnering with organizations that endorse or oppose political parties or candidates if the *partnership is nonpartisan in nature but does recommend exercising caution in identifying appropriate opportunities*. Leagues should not belong to or join coalitions or enter into partnerships that are primarily focused on supporting or opposing candidates or parties.

In addition to the questions noted above, Leagues should also consider:

1. - The timing of the partner's or coalition's endorsement (e.g. how close to the event will the endorsement come out).
2. - The balance of groups that endorse candidates vs those that do not.

2. Our League participates in a coalition that includes partisan organizations, is that ok?

Coalitions are important frameworks to build power and move work. While Leagues should neither lead or initiate coalitions with partisan organizations nor join coalitions that are led by partisan organizations, Leagues may consider joining established coalitions with partisan organizations.

In addition to the questions noted above, Leagues should consider:

1. Is there an over-representation or sole representation of one major political party?
2. How big is the coalition? While there is no specific threshold, the smaller the coalition, the less desirable it is for a League to join if there are partisan members.
3. Are partisan organizations from across the political spectrum actively invited to join?

3. Is supporting Black Lives Matter partisan? Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a movement and is not partisan. Per BLM's webpage, "[Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc. is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.](#)" Even though others may claim the issues that BLM addresses are partisan, issues are not partisan.

It is critical that the League stands in solidarity with the black community and lifts up these voices as we work together to fight against systemic racial injustice and inequalities. The League can be a strong ally by standing firm against claims that this work to dismantle systemic racism is partisan, because it simply is not.

4. Can LWVUS provide a vetted list of nonpartisan organizations or “approved organizations”? LWVUS does not provide a vetted list of nonpartisan organizations to recommend for partnerships. With the ever-changing landscape and new organizations joining the coalitions and partnerships that LWVUS/EF engages in, maintaining this list would be impossible. Additionally, in many cases, organizations operate differently depending on the state and/or community. For instance, a local organization in North Carolina may take on and lead partisan activities, whereas the same affiliate in a different state does not.

5. Can our League partner with organizations whose board members or staff are former elected officials? LWVUS does not prohibit Leagues from partnering with organizations led by former elected officials. Whether or not the partnership is nonpartisan in nature and the questions above should guide the decision. The main consideration is not the individual’s past association or role but whether they are currently serving in a role or at an organization that is aligned with the work of the League.

6. Are there visibility considerations Leagues should think about when partnering at public events? When attending public events such as rallies or tabling events where campaigns or partisan groups are also attending, we advise League members not to proactively participate in these groups’ photos or videos. Also, be mindful of the photos you share on your League’s platforms that they do not appear to highlight or promote those groups’ message or branding.

That said, at public events with many phones and cameras, your League members may inadvertently appear in the background of partisan others’ photos and videos, or they may appear in the background of yours. This is OK! It’s the nature of public events. Our advice is simply to avoid the appearance of partnership as much as possible.