

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS of Whidbey Island

OBSERVER CORPS GUIDELINES and FAQs

The League of Women Voters of Whidbey Island (LWVWI) has a valuable tool in its mission of working for good government through an active Observer Corps.  The presence of Observers helps keep government entities attentive to their jobs with the proper respect for doing the public’s business.

**What is the Observer Corps and what is its function within the League?**

* The Observer Corps exists to foster transparency and accountability.
* Observer Corps members attend council, board, commission and advisory committee meetings to observe, listen, learn, and report back to League members with factual information about the proceedings and any information about which members may be interested.
* The Observer Corps calls attention to community and public policy issues the League may wish to act/testify on based on League Position Statements.
* Observers identify issues for future study and action by the League.
* Observers’ reports will be available to the public on the LWVWI website.

**Guidelines and Best Practices for Observers**

**Getting Started**

Observers typically volunteer to observe the meetings of one council, board or commission regularly, attending all public meetings of the council, board or commission. In some cases, two or more people may divide or share meeting attendance. While there is no required term of service, we prefer to have a commitment of at least a year. There is no maximum number of terms for being an Observer. The longer Observers participate, the more familiar they will be with the individual agency as well as the role of Observers in general.

Observer Corps is open to any LWVWI member who is current with their dues.  Members of the public who are not currently members of LWVWI but are interested in serving as an Observer are encouraged to join LWVWI by going to [Join | Renew - LWV Whidbey Island](https://www.lwvwhidbey.org/join-us.html)

When an Observer is assigned to a particular agency, the Observer should first become familiar with the agency -- its purpose, members, meeting schedule, and the main issues the agency has been dealing with in recent months or years. Before the first meeting, the League will communicate with the agency by letter or email, explaining the Observer Corps program and introducing the designated Observer. The Observer should contact the agency's clerk or chair to get on any mailing or notification lists to be notified about meeting schedules, agendas, etc.

If possible, all Observers should have a designated backup person to attend meetings if the primary Observer is unable to attend. If no backup is available, the Observer Corps committee should be notified well in advance so that a substitute can be found. In the event that no substitute is available, the agency will not have an Observer present. Observers should not feel guilty if they cannot be present at every meeting. However, if absences are numerous, the Observer should consider changing their meeting selection to a time when they are more available.

**At the Meeting**

* Observers do not speak or participate in the meeting being observed. They are there to listen and learn in order to report to the League the activities and agendas of the agency being observed; and to promote transparency and accountability.
* Observers represent a non-partisan organization. Observers maintain an impartial, respectful and professional demeanor and attitude. Observers must remain neutral and not pursue personal interests at the meetings or use information obtained from outside sources to give an opinion about issues discussed at the meeting.
* Observers will identify themselves by wearing a LWV badge or name tag and/or using a LWV background during Zoom meetings.
* If Observers are asked questions regarding their views or the views of the League during the meeting the answer should be something like “ I am a League of Women Voters’ Observer and I attend these meetings to follow the activities of this agency, but not to participate in the meetings.”
* Once the meeting is adjourned, Observers may ask a simple question for clarification (e.g., checking on a date or a term), or to ask how to obtain further information on a topic.

**Reporting**

Observers use an Observer Corps Report Form to succinctly communicate with the League the issues discussed, as well as any meeting processes of concern. A copy of any pertinent materials or a link to them may be included with the report. Observers should complete their report within one week after the meeting. Reports need to be completed in a timely way to be of consequence to the League.

The report is submitted to the Observer Corps committee, which reviews the report and may ask follow-up questions of the Observer. If there are issues of concern, the report will be forwarded to the League Board. The board may then consider appropriate action. Finally, the report is made publicly available on the League website.

**Materials made available to Observers by the Observer Corps committee:**

* Agency meeting time and frequency
* The functions and/or services the agencies provide
* Observer Corps Guidelines
* Observer Corps Report Form
* League of Women Voters current Position Statements
* Observer Corps Handbook
* Training
* Copy of the Washington State Open Public Meetings Act, RCW 42.30

**How do I sign up to be an Observer?**

We will be promoting the Observer Corps in our League newsletter and occasional recruitment letters and meetings. If you are interested in learning more or volunteering, email us at observer.corps.lwvwi@gmail.com. If there is an agency or topic you are most passionate about (e.g. local government, schools, hospitals, parks and rec), please indicate that in your response.

Agencies available for observation are listed on the LWVWI website, <https://www.lwvwhidbey.org/get-involved.html>

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