

League of Women Voters of Washington
The Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy
Study Discussion/Consensus Materials

Note: if using this form to record consensus, please indicate:

Date

Discussion Leader

Unit Name or other identifier

Number of Persons participating

Introduction

The *Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy* study was adopted at the 2021 LWVWA convention. It is now ready for state-wide member study and discussion. The consensus derived from this process will be used to develop a LWVWA position which both the state and local Leagues can then use to advocate for changes to public policy.

Consensus is member agreement reached after study and discussion. It is not a simple majority, nor is it necessarily unanimity; rather, it is the overall sense of the group as expressed through the exchange of ideas and opinions. Consensus is not a vote or a poll. However, a show of hands may be used to determine the sense of the group.

Local League boards will submit a single consensus statement from their League that captures the responses to the consensus questions from its members.

The discussion questions are to help get the conversation started. To assist in the discussion, pages in the study are noted where you can find information pertaining to the question. While the responses to the consensus questions are the basis for a League position, consensus may arise from the discussion questions as well. Discussion questions are optional, and noting any major points related to the discussion questions will be helpful to the process. Record comments related to the consensus questions. All of this information will be used to draft a LWVWA position.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Where do you, your family and friends turn for reliable local news?
2. Despite significant declines in staff, circulation and coverage, local newspapers – print, online and a combination of the two – continue to provide the majority of original reporting that eventually appears on other platforms, including television news, radio news, blogs and social media. Are you concerned about what the future will be like if this decline continues, as predictions indicate it will?

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS:

1. One of the main missions of the League – at all levels, national, state and local – is to provide civic and voter education to communities. (Pages 73-74)
 - A. Please rate how important local newspapers are in assisting in this mission:
Highly Moderately Neutral Somewhat Not important No consensus

Comments:

B. Please rate how well your local newspaper performs in this public service:

Very well Moderately well Poorly No local paper No consensus

Comments:

2. Many historians and scholars believe that freedom of the press, as enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution, implied that the government had the fundamental obligation to see that journalism actually existed. (Pages 66-67, 118)

A. Do you agree this is a valid interpretation of the founders' intentions?

Strongly agree Slightly agree Neutral Slightly disagree Strongly disagree No consensus

Comments:

B. Furthermore, is it important that such an interpretation prevails today?

Strongly agree Slightly agree Neutral Slightly disagree Strongly disagree No consensus

Comments:

3. Local newspapers, as a cornerstone of a free press, are essential to our democracy.

(Pages 4, 9, 43, 62, 64, 67, 73, 74, 75, 118)

Strongly agree Slightly agree Neutral Slightly disagree Strongly disagree No consensus

Comments:

4. Federal, state, and local governments have supported news publishers with tax breaks, postal subsidies and the printing of public notices since before the country's founding. (Pages 65-67, 74)

A. The government (at any level) should provide some type of financial support to newspapers.

Strongly agree Slightly agree Neutral Slightly disagree Strongly disagree No consensus

Comments:

B. What types of support are or would be acceptable? Rank in your order of support for each.

- ☐ Direct financing
- ☐ Tax credits
- ☐ Easier transition to nonprofit status
- ☐ Legislation to allow publishers to negotiate collectively with Big Tech
- ☐ Other
- ☐ None

Comments:

Indicate any criteria for support:

Indicate any restrictions:

C. What suggestions other than government funding do you have to improve the situation of a lack of local news?

Comments:

Indicate any criteria for support:

Indicate any restrictions:

5. The crisis of the local newspaper decline has affected residents who are poor and those who live in rural communities more than other populations. This is often due to increased subscription prices, limited internet connectivity, and device costs. There should be support for ensuring access for all to local news. (Pages 17-18, 74)

Strongly agree Slightly agree Neutral Slightly disagree Strongly disagree No consensus

Comments: