



League of Women Voters of California®

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The concept of Sustainability is implicit in the Principles of the League of Women Voters. League positions are in compliance with the fundamental principle of sustainability, recognizing the interdependency among issues of public policy, and the impact of current decisions on the global welfare of future generations.

"Sustainable thinking" calls for integrating the goals of the separate League program areas. As a result, the problems or issues to be resolved may be seen in a different light, and new means of resolution may be indicated.

Definition

Sustainable communities recognize their interdependence with the global community and seek to meet current economic, environmental, and social demands through equitable and democratic means without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In sustainable communities, levels of pollution, consumption, and population size are in keeping with regional carrying capacity; their members share an ethic of responsibility to one another and to future generations; the full social and environmental costs of production, provision, and disposal of goods and services are acknowledged; their systems of governance and leadership encourage democratic deliberation; and their systems of urban planning enhance neighborhood livability and preserve ecological integrity.

GENERAL STATEMENT

Sustainability refers to the dynamic among ecological, economic, and social systems on a global scale. It demands consideration of the interactions among positions in different program areas. League positions speak of preservation and conservation, of stewardship, of considering long-term benefits and meeting future needs.

Principles of sustainability are reflected in most program areas, although often they are implicit rather than explicit:

With respect to **government**, positions support policies that promote equity, flexibility, and responsibility so that democratic government is encouraged and protected.

With respect to **natural resources**, positions support protection and wise management in the public interest to promote an environment beneficial to life.

GOVERNMENT

- Campaign Financing
- Constitution
- Election Systems
- Initiative & Referendum
- Intergovernmental Relationships
- Public Libraries
- Redistricting
- State & Local Finances
- Voting Rights

NATURAL RESOURCES

- Agriculture
- Air Quality
- Energy
- Hazardous Materials
- Land Use
- Solid Waste
- Transportation
- Water


SOCIAL POLICY

- Child Care
- Community College
- Education
- Housing
- Juvenile Justice/Dependency
- Legal Aid
- Mental Health Care

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

CHILDREN AND FAMILY ISSUES

How did we develop these positions? 

(For more explicit support, see [LWVC--Water](#), references to future needs, assessment of economic, social, and environmental costs, as in #1a and #1f; "carrying capacity" as in #3d; references to interdependency and sustainability.)

With respect to **social policy**, positions promote the equity, justice, education, and nurturing essential to a sustainable society.

Using League Positions

Sustainability has many definitions with a common theme: meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In focusing on the complex interrelationship among Earth's systems, the concept ties together many League positions and reiterates League program goals.

- Sustainable development depends on the integration of social, economic, and environmental goals.
- Sustainable governing policies and practices recognize the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic impacts, and provide for long-term protection of natural and social resources. These interrelationships are reflected in the use of "*full-cost accounting*" that assesses all direct and indirect economic, environmental, and social costs of production and programs.
- Sustainable governance decisions are based on comprehensive information and evaluation, and encourage public and individual responsibility for maintaining a healthy ecology.
- Democratic sustainable governance relies upon public participation in decision making.

Integrating League Positions

For purposes of clarity and depth, League studies have traditionally focused on specific, and deliberately narrowed topics. The resulting positions often omit consideration of interrelationships or, at least, leave them unstated. Action decisions, therefore, may involve examination of a number of relevant positions and consideration of overlapping issues and impacts. It may be necessary to set priorities and make choices among competing near-term objectives. Long-term goals should not be in competition.

Aspects of Sustainability Not Directly Addressed in LWV Positions

League positions, in general, do not speak to the application of limits. Although the need to conserve non-renewable resources is recognized ([LWVUS-- Natural Resources](#)), and the global impact of population pressures is mentioned ([LWVUS-- International Development Assistance](#)), the effects on society of generally unlimited levels of population and resource consumption in the United States are not addressed. Desirable levels, or limits, of population, economic growth, or of individual, national, or global consumption are not directly addressed in League positions.

Existing positions may be used in areas that impact population and consumption, as, for example, under reproductive choices, growth management, and energy conservation

positions. However, to take action with respect to limits on population, growth, or consumption, further study leading to new positions would be needed.

Local Uses of the Policy

Local Leagues may look for sustainable development in their cities and counties, for example, by monitoring general plans and ordinances for integration of the "three e's": environment, economy, and equity; by analyzing school board actions affecting equity and quality of education; by evaluating health care accessibility, etc. Also by advocating broad-based participation in determining indicators (all the players at the table) Leagues can promote equitable community planning.

Measuring Sustainability: Indicators

Progress toward achieving community sustainability can be measured by monitoring changes in selected characteristics, or indicators. These should be quantifiable, readily available, and easily understood, such as levels of air pollution, crowding of schools, rates of infant mortality, etc. Indicators are necessarily oriented to the needs of the community in question. Broad-based community involvement in identifying important indicators is a crucial step in achieving social equity. It is a way of recognizing that different issues may be important to different segments of the population. (For examples of indicators, and additional details on their selection and application, see the *LWVC Sustainability Task Force Report*, April 1998.)

Background

This Action Policy statement, resulting from the work of the LWVC Task Force on Sustainable Communities (1997 to 1998), is based on:

- Review of state positions as listed in the *LWVC 1995-1997 Positions Folder*
- Review of national positions as listed in the *LWVUS 1996-1998 Impact on Issues*
- Review of the report of the U.S. President's Council on Sustainable Development (1996)
- Survey of members of local Leagues in California (1998-1999).

History of the Concept

1972: The UN held the first conference on Human Development in Stockholm. The concept of sustainable development emerged from concerns of developing countries about the overconsumption and waste in developed countries.

1987: The UN convened the World Commission on Environment and Development which wrote the report, "Our Common Future" (also referred to as the Brundtland Report). This report emphasizes the links between growth, economics, technology, and the environment. Sustainable development is recommended as a solution to worldwide resource degradation and the resulting threat of economic collapse. The Brundtland Report was the first to define sustainable development.

1992: The UN Conference on Environmental Development met and addressed the gross inequities that still existed between developed and developing nations and declared that the capacity of the Earth's ability to provide resources and handle wastes was fast approaching its

limits. The Earth Summit created "Action 21," a plan for the 90's and beyond which included strategies to halt environmental degradation and to promote sustainable development in all countries.

1995: The U.S. President's Council on Sustainable Development made policy recommendations that included the education of citizens about consumer practices that lead to more sustainable lifestyles.

The President's Council on Sustainable Development identified goals or "shared aspirations" necessary for achieving sustainability and organized them into ten categories:

- Health and the Environment
- Economic Prosperity
- Equity
- Conservation of Nature
- Stewardship
- Sustainable Communities
- Civic Engagement
- Population
- International Responsibility
- Education

The Council warned that these categories "are truly interdependent and flow from the Council's understanding that *it is essential to seek economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social equity together. The achievement of any one goal is not enough to ensure that future generations will have at least the same opportunities to live and prosper that this generation enjoys: all are needed.*"

Note: Every local League received a copy of the April 1998 *Sustainability Task Force Report* in October, 1998.

As Adopted by Delegates to LWVC Convention 1999; Readopted at last convention.

This LWVC policy may be used by ILOs and local Leagues at their respective levels.

WHAT IS A VERTICAL POSITION? A vertical position is a position arrived at through a national, state or ILO study which has been approved for use at lower levels of League without prior permission. If a local League wants to use a position locally which is not vertical, the local League should first contact a member of the LWVC board of directors. Vertical positions are indicated by "Begin Vertical-End Vertical" notation.



The League is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization of women and men which never supports or opposes candidates or political parties.