**Introduction to the Consensus Study Process**

**The Study Committee hopes that every League will find the time between October 1 and March 21 to have a consensus meeting on the arming of school personnel. We are the first state working toward such an important position. The questions have been proposed in such a way to help us develop a comprehensive position, which, combined with other positions, will help at all levels in strongly advocating for the health and safety of our students, school personnel and the communities in which they are located across the state.**

**This study was a grassroots proposal at the 2019 League of Women Voters of Ohio State Convention. A League member brought the issue to light when she learned that Ohio school districts could and were arming school personnel without community knowledge due to a loophole in the Gun Free School Zones Act (1990, Federal Law). The statement and scope of the study, as approved by Convention, was:**

“Moves consideration of a new study to assess the impact on the health and safety of students, school personnel and communities when school personnel are armed while on school grounds. Rationale includes a potential increase in risk of harm if school personnel are armed. Further, school boards are allowed to arm school personnel without informing the community. Our scope would include risk of harm to students, school personnel and communities, mishandling of firearms, training, cost, accountability and liability issues. LWV Hudson will take the lead for the study. “

**Some points to think about before deciding how you will proceed with the actual consensus meeting:**

* **Send out the definitions and summary documents to all your members well before the consensus meeting. It will allow them to have background information to make a decision about becoming part of the presentation team for the consensus meeting. It also allows members to come to a consensus meeting prepared.**
* **There are a number of questions, divided by topic. In order for better discussion, you might want to plan two meetings for discussion. There are a lot of opinions and you will want sufficient time for all to have their say. Discussion time should have limits so that the meeting is no longer than 2 hours.**
* **For informational purposes, you may want to plan a forum on the issue. If you do, follow League guidelines on forums for issues without a position.**
* **A small committee or presentation team, whereby each person takes a topic to study ahead of the meeting, is an efficient way of handling all the material. Each person will then lead the discussion of the question/s for that topic. The full bibliography is for your information and can be consulted if a question requiring more detail arises or if the team member wants to add to the summaries provided. This person would also set out the background issues to consider.**
* **Ask a member to be an overall facilitator. This person needs to be able to organize the team, keep a meeting moving, and have good communication skills. Being an expert on the topic is not necessary. This person should help in moving on when no consensus is possible.**
* **The recorder is key in putting together the final report. Choose early! Ask someone who can stay focused and accurately report the discussion. Even when no consensus was obtained, it is important to tell us about the discussion and the stumbling blocks in the comment section. Information given us in the comments section will be very useful in crafting the final position.**

**The Study Committee has tried to remain very neutral, looking at all sides of the issue. We ask that League members come with an open mind to the discussion. We found that thinking beyond our own districts and situations changed some of our opinions. Just to name a couple of important ones:**

* The location of the school district: urban, suburban, rural, might make a difference.
* Type of educational setting: traditional classroom vs new open space, might change your thoughts.
* Be sure to cite ORC code for law that permits loophole for school boards to make a decision on ASP and allow any school personnel to be chosen to carry a firearm in schools
* School Boards have the right to make an executive decision to arm school personnel. Executive decisions do not have to be disclosed to the public.
* Which groups determine the requirements for ASP training programs
* Building design plan

**Reminder:**

**Consensus is an agreement among a substantial number of members, reached after study, leading to the formulation of a statement of position.**

**In the consensus process, it is not initially the job of the study committee to produce a statement with which your membership is asked to agree or disagree. Rather, the study committee, with board approval, must first frame questions to guide your League members’ discussion, provide background materials and a presentation outline, and distribute all of these to your members prior to a consensus meeting.**

*Consensus is the overall decision-making process by which substantial agreement among members is reached on an issue. Often this happens over the course of several meetings, but may include surveys and other methods. If the members reach consensus, the board forms recommended positions based on that consensus. Those recommendations are submitted to the Study Committee.*

**Consensus is a decision-making approach that seeks to secure the support of the whole group for the decision at hand. Many people believe that consensus is the same thing as unanimous agreement, but this is not necessarily the case. Unanimity is when everyone agrees. Consensus is when no one disagrees.**

**In consensus, we do not vote. Discussion happens. Then the group is asked which statement (with or without modifications) can the group live with as the best they can say from the discussion. If there is no agreement, then there is no consensus.**

**The Consensus Meeting/s**

A successful consensus meeting is well prepared and well run. The purpose of the meeting is to present the results of the study to the members, to stimulate and guide their discussion and to record their responses to the consensus questions.

**Members** should have received and read all written material in advance. If using two meetings, let members know which topics will be covered at each of the meetings. **With this study, we recommend sending out the terms, links to the short articles, and the consensus questions in advance. The full bibliography is a reference piece if needed by the resource person.** A member of the study committee, acting as a resource person, introduces the subject by giving a brief summary of the committee’s findings before the start of the discussion and supplies factual information as needed. **This information is provided in a short paper for each consensus subcategory.**

The **Discussion Leader** should have a discussion outline based on the consensus questions **and the meeting’s timeline.** Discussion should be open and free-flowing but kept strictly on track so that all consensus questions can be given equal consideration.

A **Recorder**, appointed in advance of the meeting, is responsible for noting salient points of the debate and responses to consensus questions, including all minority points of view. It is important that the recorder read these notes to the members before the meeting is adjourned to make sure the thoughts have been captured accurately.

Prior to the consensus meeting(s) a briefing meeting should be held as a rehearsal for resource persons and discussion leaders. This is especially useful if a number of unit meetings are held to reach consensus: every unit should benefit from the same discussion plan.

The **Resource Person** is a well-informed member of the study committee, who may attend a consensus meeting to act as a resource, i.e., to answer members’ questions about background material, facts, statistics, etc. during the discussion. The resource person may introduce the topic and its principal issues and may also distribute a handout with helpful data relevant to the consensus questions. There must be no perception of bias on the part of the resource person at any time during this meeting.

**The Discussion Leader and the different Team Members who take on this role for specific categories of discussion are the keys to a smooth and productive meeting by:**

• Reminding those present that only League members may participate in the consensus process;

• Picking up from the resource person’s introduction of the material and start off the discussion;

• Being inclusive of every member present;

• Allowing dissent to be heard fully;

• Diplomatically keeping the discussion focused on the consensus questions;

• Keeping members from arguing with one another;

• Keeping track of time and move the discussion on as soon as no more new points of view emerge;

• Recognizing when consensus cannot be reached and move on;

• Recognizing when consensus is achieved and recapitulate the agreement before moving on;

• Making sure the members hear and agree with the recorder’s summary of the discussion results before they leave the meeting.

The **Recorder** has the responsibility of understanding the gist of the members’ discussion and of noting their conclusions as accurately as possible. The notes taken will help determine if consensus has been reached and can be useful when writing the position statement.

A recorder’s notes should include:

• The group’s responses to the consensus questions;

• Areas of agreement and disagreement;

• Minority views and their strength;

• Areas in which the group was undecided or needed more information;

• The number of participants.

**The Recorder should be free to ask for clarifications whenever necessary so that there will be no doubt as to what the members have concluded.**

**The consensus meeting has achieved its goal when it has educated League members on the many facets of the topics they chose to study, sparked lively debate around the consensus questions posed to, and allowed them to reach well-informed, well thought-out “citizen decisions” on the issues discussed.**

**The final report should be approved by the local board before being sent in to be compiled by the ASP Study Committee.**

**Arming School Personnel Study List of Documents:**

1. Introduction & Background
2. Introduction to the Consensus Study Process
3. Consensus Questions
   1. Decision-Making
   2. Cost and Liability
   3. The Armed Personnel, Checks, and Training
   4. Storage
   5. Perceptions of Safety in Schools
4. Summary - Environment in Schools
5. Vocabulary
6. Copy of Consensus Questions without Study Guide
7. Bibliography
8. Powerpoint