

League of Women Voters of Washington
Welcoming Immigrants to Washington State (AKA Immigration and Immigrant Integration)
Study Discussion/Consensus Materials

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

Date

Discussion Leader

League or Unit Name or other identifier

Number of Persons participating

Introduction

The *Welcoming Immigrants to Washington State* study was adopted at the 2023 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.

In its 2008 position on immigration (see [here](#), pp. 143-145), the national League of Women Voters states that it “believes that immigration policies should promote reunification of immediate families; meet the economic, business, and employment needs of the United States; and be responsive to those facing political persecution or humanitarian crises. Provision should also be made for qualified persons to enter the United States on student visas. All persons should receive fair treatment under the law. The League supports federal immigration law that provides an efficient, expeditious system (with minimal or no backlogs) for legal entry of immigrants into the United States. To complement these goals, the League supports federal policies to improve economies, education, job opportunities, and living conditions in nations with large emigrating populations.”

The LWVWA study findings are consistent with the existing position but go further in outlining the immediate and longer-term needs of immigrants after their arrival in the State of Washington. It examines contributions immigrants make to Washington State, the challenges they face, state laws that affect immigrants, current programs to help them, and gaps in services that remain. The study focuses on several categories of immigrants, including: naturalized citizens; legal permanent residents (LPRs); non-immigrant visa holders; refugees and asylum seekers; those with other legal statuses (e.g. Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals); and undocumented or unauthorized immigrants who entered the U.S. without immigration inspection or overstayed or worked in violation of their visa.

The Consensus Process

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Optional - please allow time for consensus questions)

Before tackling the consensus questions, members of Local Leagues may want to discuss some of the following:

How well is Washington doing in welcoming immigrants to the state?

What are the contributions of immigrants to the state's economy and society and how can these be enhanced?

What are the principal challenges faced by immigrants in Washington State and how can these be addressed?

What are the costs and challenges faced by the communities in which immigrants reside and how can these be addressed?

Do you think local leagues should be more engaged with the integration of immigrants? If yes, in what ways should local leagues be involved?

CONSENSUS QUESTIONS:

Please discuss if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

A. Protection of immigrants in Washington State

- 1. LWVWA should have a strong position condemning xenophobia, discrimination against immigrants, and anti-immigration rhetoric and we should encourage political leaders in Washington state to take actions to counter these threats to democracy.*

Note: Washington has designated itself a Welcoming State for immigrants. Interviewees repeatedly noted that xenophobia, discrimination and anti-immigrant rhetoric are barriers to integration. Several interviewees made the point that, as proponents of democracy, the League can play an important role in educating Washingtonians about the dangers posed by xenophobia, discrimination and anti-immigrant rhetoric (pp 50-57).

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

2. LWVWA should call on the State of Washington to continue to oppose federal policies when these policies undermine the rights of immigrants in the state.

Note: In the past, the state of Washington has taken leadership in fighting policies that violate the rights of immigrants in the state. The Washington Attorney General has successfully sued the federal government over policies, such as the Muslim ban and family separations. The state legislature has passed bills restricting the use of private detention facilities and cooperation with federal enforcement agencies unless these organizations have judicial warrants to detain immigrants. (pp. 14, 40, 46-47).

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

3. LWVWA should support state funding to ensure greater access to legal representation for immigrants.

NOTE: Our research indicates that immigrants are more likely to succeed in immigration court when they have legal representation. However, immigrants do not have a right to free legal counsel in immigration court because it is a civil, not a criminal matter. As a result, immigrants face numerous barriers to gaining legal counsel, including cost and accessibility. Other states and local jurisdictions, such as Seattle and Tacoma, have active programs underwriting the cost of legal representation but access to counsel is still a major problem. (pp 14, 37-38, 56, 64-65)

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

B. Immigrant access to essential services in Washington

4. LWVWA should base its advocacy on the proposition that state and local governments are accountable for providing essential services to all residents, regardless of immigration status.

NOTE: Essential services include affordable housing, employment, English language acquisition, interpretation and facilitation, and health and mental health services, among others. Although Washington state attempts to provide these services to all residents, there are still major gaps in such services for immigrants. (pp 28-40, 50-58)

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

5. LWVWA should support holistic approaches to welcoming immigrants that take into account the interconnected challenges that immigrants face; the need for more effective coordination amongst the state agencies that interact with immigrants and refugees; and adequate funding to permit such coordination. (Appendix 2 and pp. 14, 41-43 and 58-59)

NOTE: Numerous state agencies have programs that affect the integration of immigrants in Washington. Legislation passed in 2024 gives more authority to the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance (ORIA) to coordinate activities amongst these agencies. However, the legislature did not provide financial resources to enable ORIA to take on its new responsibilities. Interviewees noted that increased funding would also enable the Department of Social and Health Services to extend AppleCare to more immigrants and to provide more linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health services. It would also allow the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to fund more programs to help non-English speakers learn the English language and support dual language programs (pp 31-34, 41, 44-48, 47-49, 50-52, 64-66, 68-71).

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

6. LWVWA should support safe working conditions, fair pay and benefits for immigrants, regardless of immigration status.

NOTE: Research shows that improvements are especially needed for those in low-income jobs, such as agricultural workers. Actions could include consistent enforcement of state laws and policies affecting wages and benefits, conditions at the work site, and the ability to join unions that organize farmworkers and other low-income workers. (pp 34-37, 47, 50-51, 69)

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Comments:

7. LWVWA should support efforts taken by the state government and immigrant-led organizations in Washington to reduce delays in the issuance of work permits.

NOTE: Potential remedies include allowing immigrants to use Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) instead of Social Security numbers to access a greater range of state services; educating persons in Washington State who are concerned about delays in issuance of work permits about alternative options, such as granting provisional work authorization upon application, elimination or reduction in fees, and streamlining the process; and providing information to immigrants about the work authorization process. (pp. 28, 46-47)

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Comments:

C. The Role of Local Leagues in Welcoming Immigrants

(this question will not lead to a position but would potentially lead to action by local leagues.

8. LWVWA and Local Leagues (LL) should reach out proactively to immigrants and naturalized citizens to learn more about their needs and the contributions immigrants may make to the League. (See section 6 of the report for more information):

NOTE: Possible actions include:

- forming partnerships at the state and local levels with immigrant-led and immigrant-serving organizations;
- enhancing efforts to help immigrants naturalize and register to vote;
- helping naturalized citizens understand the voting process in Washington State;
- circulating the League’s civic education books or providing civics education to immigrants;
- helping prospective voters not fluent in English to understand election ballots; and
- sponsoring refugees for resettlement through the Welcome Corps, recognizing that many have had to flee because of their commitment to democratic values and the rights of all people.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Comments: