

Guidelines for Agency Observers
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League observers are an extension of the League into their community.

Observers should:

- Wear a League pin - if asked, explain that they represent LWV (local or regional)
- Arrange to be on email list to receive agenda.
- Listen, observe - especially action items - and take notes.
- Be discrete and courteous.
- Know the function of agency.
- Know the jurisdiction (city, county, region).
- Learn the names and titles of agency/board members.
- Verify date, time and place of meeting.
- Be familiar with open government laws - Brown act (know both what is required to be in open sessions and what does not need to be disclosed to the public).

Here is a link to a guide to the Brown Act:

<http://www.cacities.org/UploadedFiles/LeagueInternet/86/86f75625-b7df-4fc8-ab60-de577631ef1e.pdf>

For a short report to the relevant League board, (a paragraph or two) the observer should try to include as much of the following as possible:

- Who attended, who was absent from the meeting
- How the meeting was conducted. Whether there were any red flags about procedure, accountability and/or transparency as a public agency.
- Whether the meeting was announced in advance as required.
- Whether the agenda available 72 hours in advance.
- Whether the agenda followed.
- Whether the meeting proceeded in a professional manner.
- Whether agenda items are discussed by agency board members, or are decisions reached without discussion (this can happen when board members discuss items beforehand amongst themselves - not allowed by law [see Brown Act for specifics] or discussion doesn't take place because board members come prepared to vote and don't have additional questions)
- Whether all action items were posted online
- Whether the meeting venue was accessible to the public.
- Whether any agenda items voted on relate to League positions/priorities and whether decisions align or not with League positions/priorities.

In general League observers do not speak at meetings they observe. When comment from the League is needed, another League member (usually the League's president)

will attend or write a letter to the agency head or the chair of the board. There may be an exception to this rule, but the observer should contact their president/liason before making comments themselves to the agency. For example, the observer may want to remind the agency that not enough time was given to post the agenda or the description of the agenda item was insufficient for the public to know what was being discussed or voted on.

What does your League do with the information gathered? For example,

- Make written comments to the agency regarding correction of a violation of open government laws.
- Publish a short piece in the local and/or regional *Voter* to educate the League members on what an agency is doing/not doing.

Comments sometimes lead to significant changes in how an agency runs its meetings or comes to a decision on an issue if the observations lead to League testimony at the agency. If asked by someone attending the meeting why the League representative is there, the best answer is, "The League supports transparency in government. Observing this meeting is one way we support that principle." League observers also extend the League's visibility in their community.