

League of Women Voters Hudson, Observer Corps Overview

Pat Simons, LWVH

LWVO MLD Training, May 21, 2016

Hand-out

LWVH Observer Corps Basics

Suggested General References for Observer Corps

Resources used by LWVH in their Resource Guide for OC Training

LWVH Observers Report Form (generic use for all local government meetings)

- Page 1, objective reporting on Sunshine Laws compliance, Best Practices, Public Records Access
- Page 2, subjective reporting on League issues aligned with positions and community concerns

LWVH Event Planning Checklist for creating the LWVH Observer Corps

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LWVH Observer Corps Basics

Ohio Open Meetings Act. "Any action taken by a public body while that body is in violation of the Open Meetings Act is invalid." Ohio Sunshine Laws Manual

Ohio Public Records Act "Ohio Law has long provided the public scrutiny of state and local government records." Ohio Sunshine Laws Manual

"LWV's principles include the requisite that government bodies protect the citizen's right to know by giving adequate notice of proposed actions, holding open meetings and making public records accessible." Looking for Sunshine, LWVUS

LWV = Transparency and accountability in government.

- Have a fundamental understanding of League's purpose and role as observers: Observe, Record, Report.
LWVUS Looking for Sunshine, Protecting Your Right to Know
LWVUS Observing Your Government in Action Guide

- Provide Observer Corps training and mentoring. Jump drives with training info. Observers: Board appointments for one year.

- Have a fundamental understanding of Ohio's Sunshine Laws
Ohio Sunshine Laws Manual 2016; Ohio Attorney General Sunshine Laws Trainings

- Be knowledgeable of a public body's policies making them compliant with Sunshine Laws; understand the role of the public body; identify the elected officials and administrative staff.
Review websites; it is common for this information to be stated in full on the website.

- Create a report template simple in format; one part that provides objective reporting of Sunshine Law compliance and one part that allows subjective reporting of League's interest/issues based on positions.

- Have a basic understanding of League positions that may apply to a public body's function/decision-making.
LWVUS Positions
LWVO Positions
(LWVH also has positions subsequent to national and state positions.)

- Create observer teams to share assignments; encourage members to pursue their areas of interest.

- Create a procedure for easy electronic reporting (no paper); send reports directly to the Board for review.

- Onsite observation is best but it is acceptable for observation by live stream or archive on websites and or viewed through local cable stations. *Video recorded meetings are public record.*

- Send a form letter to the public body introducing League Observer Corps, state role and purpose; note that both onsite and online observation are used; inform how reports are used; state names of observers; include Board contact information.

- Log observer volunteer hours on report form; log any and all time spent in observing, recording and reporting; include travel time. *Good PR statistic for League.*

An active observer corps strengthens League and effects good government. It invites all members to participate in personal and important ways within their own schedules and by making the 'work' as easy as possible. Applying MLD strategy - a focus on less active and new members can increase membership retention and be a first rung on the leadership ladder.

Suggested General References for Observer Corps

Ohio Sunshine Laws – Public Records Act and Open Meetings Act

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine, website for services <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Services>

Ohio Sunshine Laws Manual 2016 – An Open Government Resource Manual (updated annually)

Request hard copy for free, including shipping and handling

<http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Legal/Sunshine-Laws/Sunshine-Laws-Publication-Request-Form>

Download copy from website

<http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Publications-Files/Publications-for-Legal/Sunshine-Law-Publications/2015-Sunshine-Laws-Manual.aspx>

Table of Contents Suggested Highlights

Overview of Public Records Act

Chapter 1 Public Records Defined: A, B, C

Chapter 5 Records Management

Overview of Public Meetings Act

Chapter 1 Public Body and Meeting Defined: A, B

Chapter 2 Duties of the Public Body: A, B, C, D

Chapter 3 Executive Session: A, B, D

Ohio Attorney General Sunshine Laws Training – free and open to the public; certificate of attendance issued upon completion

Onsite training option, locations around the state of Ohio sponsored by various organizations but always an Attorney General's office presenter

<http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Legal/Sunshine-Laws/Sunshine-Law-Training> (4hours)

Online training option (12 hour completion requirement)

<https://sunshinelaw.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/>

LWVUS Looking for Sunshine, Protecting Your Right to Know

[http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/LWVUS%20-%20Looking%20for%20the%20Sunshine\(1\).pdf](http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/LWVUS%20-%20Looking%20for%20the%20Sunshine(1).pdf)

LWVUS Observing Your Government in Action Guide

[http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/LWVUS%20-%20Observing%20Your%20Government%20in%20Action\(2\).pdf](http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/LWVUS%20-%20Observing%20Your%20Government%20in%20Action(2).pdf)

LWVUS Positions

Impact on Issues <http://www.lwv.org/content/impact-issues>

LWVO Positions

Agenda for Action [http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/LWVO%20-%202011-2013%20Agenda%20for%20Action\(2\).pdf](http://www.lwvohio.org/assets/attachments/file/LWVO%20-%202011-2013%20Agenda%20for%20Action(2).pdf)

In the Shadows at the Statehouse

<http://ohio.com/editorial/in-the-shadows-at-the-statehouse-1.564292>

By Steve Hoffman, Beacon Journal editorial writer, 330-996-3740 or slhoffman@thebeaconjournal.com.

Published: February 4, 2015

Public Service and Open Records, ABJ editorial, May 2, 2016

<http://www.ohio.com/editorial/editorials/public-service-and-open-records-1.680067>

Ohio Supreme Court Overturns Ruling in Olentangy School Board Case

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2016/05/03/ohio-supreme-court-overturns-ruling-in-olentangy-school-board-case.html> Catherine Candinsky, Columbus Dispatch; Published May 3, 2016

Supreme Court ruling that all forms of communication, including electronic, that constitute a meeting of a public body must conform to Sunshine Laws. LWVO amicus brief in the lawsuit.

When E-mails Make a Meeting, ABJ Editorial, published. May 12, 2016

<http://www.ohio.com/editorial/editorials/when-emails-make-a-meeting-1.682576>

Sample: Resources used by LWVH in their Resource Guide for OC Training

(Government operates and communicates through its websites; much of Sunshine Laws compliance can be determined by navigating the websites with knowledge of Sunshine Laws)

LWVH <http://www.lwvohio.org/index.htm>

LWVH Advocacy—<http://www.lwvohio.org/advocacy2.htm>

LWVH Positions, Local and Regional <http://www.lwvohio.org/positions2.htm>

LWVH Studies - <http://www.lwvohio.org/Studies.htm>

HCSD and BOE Electronic Communications

Website and Links and Apps on Smart phone with full access to the website

Hudson City School District (HCSD) <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us>

BOE Link: Click Choose a school – District Home, Click About Us - Board of Education

HCSD Board of Education/Profiles <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/domain/77>

Board of Education Meeting Agendas <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/Page/126>

Board Meeting Minutes <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/Page/2250>

Live Stream and Archive Board Meeting Viewing <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/Page/2251>

Attending Board Meetings <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/Page/3888>

Board Bylaws and Policies <http://www.neola.com/hudson-oh/>

Policy Revisions in Process <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/Page/3887>

Coffees with the Board <http://www.hudson.k12.oh.us/Page/6228>

E-subscribe are updates available to the public www.hudson.k12.oh.us

Home Page, Click Register; after registering Click on My Account; Choose areas of interest and Click on them; upon completion, Click and Done.

HCTV Government Meeting Schedule (BOE meetings)

<http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=195>

Hudson Public Library and Historical Society <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/>

Policies and Procedures: General and Administrative <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/Policies.html> Regulations and Bylaws http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/documents/HLHS%20Regulations_20141125.pdf

Library Articles of Incorporation http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/documents/Articles_of_Incorporation.pdf

Board of Trustees Election Procedures <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/ElecProc.pdf>

Public Comments <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/PublicComment.pdf>

Public Comment Form <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/PublicCMForm.pdf>

Budget and Expenditures <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/BudgetsandExpenditures.pdf>

Historic Endowment Fund <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/HistoricEndowmentFund.pdf>

Public Records Policy <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/PublicRec.pdf>

Public Records Report Form <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/RecordsRequestForm.pdf>

Board of Directors/Trustees <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/BoardofDirectors.html>

Meeting schedule: Board of Trustees, Endowment, Finance; Regulations and Bylaws

Minutes and Resolutions:

Board of Trustees <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/BoardofDirectorsResolutions.html> ,

Endowment <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/BoardofDirectorsResolutions.html> ,

Finance <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/BoardofDirectorsResolutions.html> ;

Annual Report <http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/AnnualReport2013.pdf>

Friends of the Library, 501c3, volunteers and fundraisers

<http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/VolunteerOpportunities/Friends.html>

Volunteer Policy and Description of Friends of the Library

<http://www.hudsonlibrary.org/AboutHLHS/policies/Volunteers.pdf>

LWVH Library Study Know Your Library <http://www.lwvohio.org/docs/Know%20your%20library%20final.pdf>

City of Hudson <http://www.hudson.oh.us/>

City Charter (Current charter is in review for 2015)

[http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/ohio/hudson_oh/codifiedordinancesofhudsonohio?f=templates\\$fn=default.htm\\$3.0\\$vid=amlegal:hudson_oh](http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/ohio/hudson_oh/codifiedordinancesofhudsonohio?f=templates$fn=default.htm$3.0$vid=amlegal:hudson_oh)

City Government <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=27>

City Council <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?nid=93>

City Manager <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?nid=96>

Mayor <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=113>

City Departments <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=31>

Boards and Commissions <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?nid=83>

Agendas and Minutes <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?nid=114>

Public Records <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=223>

HCTV <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=103>

Government meetings livestreamed <http://www.hudson.oh.us/index.aspx?NID=116>

LWV Hudson (Ohio) Observer Report

Public Body

Date

Time

Type of Meeting (underline one) Regular Special Workshop Emergency

FEATURE EVALUATED	YES	NO	COMMENTS
Did meeting start on time?			Start Time End Time
Were all elected/appointed members present? Last name, Specify officials' titles			Present Absent
Was a quorum present?			
Did the members come prepared for discussion?			
Did members act with professional conduct between themselves and with the public?			
Were Robert's Rules of Order followed?			
Were pre-meeting documents available to the public? i.e. pre-meeting or media packets			
Was the agenda posted before the meeting and accessible at the meeting?			Date Posted
Were minutes available for public record?			
Were agenda items clearly described in open discussion and supported with documentation?			
Was Executive Session on the agenda?			Reason
Were minutes approved?			
Was the public in attendance?			Number Estimate
Was media present? Name the organization.			
Was administrative staff present? Last Name, Specify staff titles			Present Absent
Was there opportunity for public comment?			
Was notification of the meeting time/date provided to the public? (Regular/special/emergency/workshop)			Date Posted
Was the meeting facility accessible for limited mobility individuals and or adequate for the public in general?			
Have you (Observer) had any difficulty securing public records from this public body?			

LWV Hudson (Ohio) Observer Report

Public Body

Date

Time

Type of Meeting (underline one) Regular Special Workshop Emergency

- List key themes expressed during Public Comments time

- List notable action items of interest; Indicate pass, fail, tabled. (refer to minutes for all action items)

- List notable pending action items (refer to minutes for all pending items)

- Were issues addressed that are relevant to any current League positions, programs or of potential interest and or of immediate community concern? List

Log Volunteer Hours _____

Observer:

Date Report Submitted:

- Submit report to LWVH President, Secretary and eVoter chair before the next board meeting (first Monday of the month).
- Any immediate Advocacy issues should be addressed ASAP with LWVH President.

Thank you

Planning Checklist November 2014 - February 2015

League Name: LWV of Hudson

Event/Activity Goals: 1. Promoting LWV membership/leadership development

League Event/Activity: LWVH Observer Corps Training

	Direct Outreach	Allied Outreach	Media Outreach	Leadership Development
Before the event	<p>Be able to clearly state the importance of OC to Board and members and benefits to the community and local govt.; local government emphasis is necessary due to local governance variances but training is applicable to all open meetings.</p> <p>Request funding (ongoing budget item) and clarification of policies and procedures by the Board.</p> <p>Gain understanding of Sunshine Laws and comprehensive info on local govt. structure and operations; be creative and flexible using advances in electronic communications.</p> <p>Create a training that offers guidance, resources, and a sustainable program, including take home materials, hard copy, CD and USB drive.</p> <p>Involve the LWVH board in all planning and implementation procedures; get Board buy in.</p> <p>January member coffee, give presentation and invite members participation. City manager present and able to hear our plan.</p> <p>February planning meeting, plug for the training.</p> <p>LWVH newsletter article with members' invitation with RSVP. Two reminder emails and personal phone calls to members.</p>	<p>Hudson Library, City Government and Board of Education will be notified and or interviewed for training information.</p> <p>Seek materials from Att. General, LWVUS, LWVO, Regional League, LWVH website materials, Government Websites.</p>		<p>Enhance leadership skills by offering a program that fosters independent action based on sound training, communications, League information, positions and principles.</p> <p>Evolving leaders require mentoring and good communication. Build mentoring into OC program.</p> <p>Suggest to the Board that an OC coordinator be appointed to be the point person for the program. Would not need to be an elected board member. This position is a form of leadership.</p>

	<p>Member retention: opportunities to learn based on personal interest, community positive influence, understand League's unique position to influence good open government.</p> <p>Membership growth includes retention but OC is good PR for LWVH and may draw potential members who did not know about this program or the service LWVH provides; it may be attractive to youth in particular.</p> <p>Reserve space that is comfortable, central location, good parking, easy mobility, technology hook-ups available</p>			
At the event	<p>Handout copies of USB drive with PPT, information folders, and hard copy handouts and LWV pins to each participant.</p> <p>Have snacks on hand.</p> <p>Tables and chairs set up with clear viewing.</p> <p>Viewing screen and computer set up.</p> <p>Keep presentation within time range of 1.5 hours but offer to stay for further information.</p> <p>Allow for questions.</p> <p>Seek sign-up commitments by the end of the evening (1 year, May to May). Baby steps, offer shadowing until May.</p> <p>Clearly state the importance and benefits of OC to individuals, community and local govt.</p> <p>Training will be comprehensive but many reference and resource materials are available for review as well as continued mentoring.</p> <p>Clarify and encourage electronic reporting and assure training is available.</p>			<p>Invite participants to share their experiences working with local government. Invite feedback on the influence of OC for LWVH, individuals, community and local govt.</p> <p>Assure observers of continued support in the form of mentoring from both trainers and the board.</p> <p>Open discussion in how observers serve. And how to enhance the program with creative ideas.</p>

<p>After the event</p>	<p>Trainers and or board will follow up with new observers. Match observers to their area of interest; facilitate baby steps to onsite or remote observation, preparation, reporting etc. President, Secretary, eVoter chair will receive the reports. Secy maintains permanent copy. Redacted copy goes onto LWVH website under a new link for public and member viewing.</p> <p>Board to have a point person who can monitor the program. Either an appointment or an elected Director.</p>	<p>March is Sunshine Laws Week. Send Sunshine Laws Week Greetings letters to all local government thanking them for their service to protect citizens' right to know.</p> <p>Join area Leagues to insert an article in large newspapers, ABJ, PD with a joint statement of Sunshine Week.</p> <p>*Consider contacting Hub reporters to interview local government about changes they have made to enhance transparency, accountability, adherence to Sunshine Laws and how they protect the citizen's right to know. Invite interview with LWVH at the same time to talk about OC and the work we do in local government. The addition of reference materials offered the public in alignment with the meeting agendas is a significant change and service to the community.</p>	<p>March is Sunshine Laws Week. Lots of LWV info ready for publication - LWVH board could use PR pieces for our website, newsletter and the Hub Times.</p> <p>*Consider contacting Hub reporters to interview local government about changes they have made to enhance transparency, accountability, adherence to Sunshine Laws and how they protect the citizen's right to know. Invite interview with LWVH at the same time to talk about OC and the work we do in local government. City and BOE addition of agenda information online is a significant change and service to the community.</p>	<p>Over time observers become more expert in local government, League issues and positions and advocacy. Along with mentoring, resources and good communication observers will gain more confidence and can claim expertise on behalf of LWVH.</p> <p>The report forms are structured to encourage expression of insights and inquiries, to raise issues and promote advocacy.</p> <p>There are direct lines between OC activity that brings greater expertise and leadership growth.</p>
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