

Suggested Guidelines For the Operation of an American Legion Boys State Program

THE AMERICAN LEGION



FOREWORD

The American Legion believes there is no better way to assure the survival of our republic than to train our young people in the ideals and objectives of American government. By teaching youth to understand and appreciate the basic principles involved in the successful management of a democratic society, we can keep America strong and ensure freedom for future generations. These are the long-standing objectives of each American Legion Boys State program.

The longstanding resolution previously giving the national Americanism Commission authority to enforce American Legion Boys State eligibility and participation mandates dissolved when Public Law 112-66 amended the federal charter of The American Legion. With that change, American Legion departments now possess authority for establishing their own criteria for American Legion Boys State program eligibility, selection, participation and operation. The national Americanism Commission continues to have authority for oversight of the American Legion Boys Nation program.

In the pages that follow an attempt is made to suggest and recommend standards for operating an American Legion Boys State program. Each individual state's government is unique, as are the resources available to each respective American Legion department, and as noted above, each American Legion department has autonomy for operating their American Legion Boys State program. Consequently, the following guidelines are offered and intended only as suggestions and recommendations and should not be considered as mandates by the national organization.

This document was first developed in 1965 by a select committee of American Legion Boys State directors and was amended in 1994, 2000, 2016, 2018 and 2021, so as to reflect current standards of operation.

What is American Legion Boys State?

American Legion Boys State is a youth development program offering young male students better insight into the practical operation of state government and to demonstrate that citizens are responsible for the character and success of their government. As such, American Legion Boys State is an activity of high educational value, born out of the need for youth development and practical citizenship.

American Legion Boys State is a “leadership action program” where qualified male high school juniors take part in a practical government course. It is designed to

develop a working knowledge of the structure of state government and to impress upon the citizen the fact that our government is just what we make it.

American Legion Boys State is participatory education in its truest sense. Its success is dependent upon student involvement; of actually becoming a mythical state government and operating it as such. It is an objective citizenship training program which strives to inculcate individual responsibility to the community, state and nation.

American Legion Boys State Objectives

American Legion Boys State is a nonpartisan program that encompasses many objectives, all of which are important. The following is an outline of those which The American Legion feels are the most important:

- To develop civic leadership and pride in American citizenship. The American Legion hopes that each citizen attending American Legion Boys State will return to his community a better citizen and that The American Legion has developed in that citizen a desire to demonstrate this fact by his willingness to make civic contributions that will help to make his community a better place in which to live.
- To inspire a keen interest in the detailed study of state government. The American Legion is designed to create more than just a passive interest in the actual study of government – it strives to create that interest which will be born of the desire for knowledge.
- To develop a determination in citizens to maintain our form of government, primarily by bringing them to the realization of how great it is to be an American.

NOTE: The final two objectives are taken from the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion.

- To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the Community, State and Nation.
- To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of Justice, Freedom and Democracy.

To realize the objectives as outlined above, the following is strongly recommended:

- 1) That American Legion Boys State be operated on the basis of the organization of government existing in their respective states. This includes

the government process beginning at the local level, or municipality, and continuing through the state government structure.

- 2) That instruction in the organization and function of political parties at all levels be included in the program curriculum.**
- 3) That American Legion Boys State be organized into two mythical political parties. The most common names used by most programs are the “Nationalists” and “Federalists.”**
- 4) That sponsorship of citizens to attend American Legion Boys State be actively sought from civic organizations, interested businesses, etc., as well as through The American Legion.**
- 5) That the application of a citizen be signed by an authorized person from his high school, as well as an authorized American Legion official, and that it bears the name and address of the sponsor.**
- 6) That prospective citizens undergo a physical examination prior to reporting to American Legion Boys State, and a copy of the parental or guardian release be furnished to the appropriate American Legion Boys State official.**
- 7) That American Legion Boys State programs purchase liability insurance coverage and accident/medical insurance for participants and staff.**
- 8) That American Legion Boys State programs observe Resolution No. 32 of the National Executive Committee, October 2020, which urges establishing procedures and policies for sexual abuse awareness training and criminal history background check screening similar to those of the national organization for those adults who are selected to support The American Legion Boys State program.**
- 9) That American Legion Boys State programs observe Resolution No. 31 of the National Executive Committee, May 2000, which reminds all American Legion posts, departments and the national organization, that when referencing American Legion Boys State, that the titles of these programs include the words “American Legion” as a prefix to any individual titles.**
- 10) That American Legion Boys State programs observe Resolution No. 16 of the National Executive Committee, October 2016, encouraging chairmen and directors of any American Legion youth program, including American Legion Boys State, to make clear to all participants in advance of the program that The American Legion has the expectation for rendering proper respect to the Flag of the United States, at all times, including during the National Anthem; and if any participant will not live up to this expectation, that individual should not be allowed to be a participant in**

American Legion programs, or should be removed from the program and not be allowed any further participation.

American Legion Boys State Governing Body

Each American Legion Boys State program should have a governing body, organized within the respective American Legion department in that state. Several names have been used by the various departments to refer to this group. The most common are board of directors, American Legion Boys State Commissions and American Legion Boys State Committees. Some are incorporated within the laws of the respective state, some are not. Each department should make its own determination as to whether or not this is desirable.

Who is to serve on the governing body should be a decision made by the respective American Legion department officials. Experience has proven several worthwhile recommendations. Those recommendations are:

- Each department giving careful consideration to the selection of those members of The American Legion and American Legion Family who are interested in the welfare and education of the youth of this nation.
- American Legion Boys State encompassing the entire geographical area of the host state, therefore, representation on the governing body should not be limited to just certain areas of the state.
- Leaving size and tenure of the governing body to the discretion of the respective American Legion department. The number of members of the body will vary by program. There are programs having more than 15 members and some with as few as five.

The following specific duties and responsibilities are usually vested in the governing body:

- Formation of policies and the administration of the American Legion Boys State program.
- Financial arrangements, collections, deposits, payments and operation of the American Legion Boys State program.
- Selection of a director or similar individual to administer the American Legion Boys State program.

- Selection of the site of the American Legion Boys State program and necessary financial arrangements.
- Formulate and issue applications for the American Legion Boys State program. There is no standard application but several basic informational items to consider including are full name of the applicant, home address, telephone number, email address, age and school. The application should also include the name and address of parents or legal guardian, with their home and work phone numbers, and email address. The name and address of the sponsor (post or other group) should also be included on the application.
- Set the fee to be charged for attending the program.

Conducting an American Legion Boys State Program

The program director, program coordinator or whatever the person-in-charge may be titled, should have responsibility for the operation of the program, delegating responsibilities as necessary so as to adequately address responsibilities of the position. Other members of the American Legion Boys State program staff are typically divided into the following categories: administrative, instructional and counseling staff.

The Administrative Staff is responsible for the general and overall administration of the American Legion Boys State program. The Administrative Staff is often led by a Director for Administration, who has responsibility for coordinating the work of the entire staff. They are responsible to the director of the program for the proper functioning of the administrative department.

The Instructional Staff is responsible for the educational aspects of the program, which might also include organized recreational activities. There is usually one individual designated to lead this particular phase of the program and they are responsible to the director for its proper functioning. Additional information concerning the instructional staff can be found in the section entitled “Instructional Program for American Legion Boys State.”

The Counseling Staff determines the success or failure of the program. There are many areas of thought existing throughout the various American Legion Boys State programs as to the best method of selecting and assigning counselors. Some states use former American Legion Boys Staters as junior counselors, placing them in a city with an experienced counselor. Others use college students as their counselors, often drawing from the campus on which the program is being held. A counselor with responsibilities over two or three cities assigned to a county is considered desirable and strongly recommended.

Military assistance is often available to American Legion Boys States. Service academies are interested in American Legion Boys State and may be able to place their cadet(s) at each of the programs. Use of academy personnel differs, but many states have found them most valuable when assigned for the entire week to a position on the staff. A letter to the superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the U.S. Air Force Academy, and the U.S. Coast Guard Academy should be the first step in seeking this support.

All branches of the military, both active and reserves, have made many outstanding contributions to the American Legion Boys State programs through the use of their personnel as staff members. Their involvement is beneficial.

Orientation of American Legion Boys State Staff

All members of the American Legion Boys State staff should be assembled in an intensive school of instruction prior to the opening of their program. This school should be a complete briefing on all aspects of the program and should be presented by those responsible for the proper execution of the program in a particular area, as well as an overall briefing by the director.

Among the subjects that should be addressed during the orientation session should include policies and procedures of the respective program; liability, safety, and risk mitigation concerns; review of special needs for citizens; review of schedules, activities, and curriculum of the program.

American Legion Boys State Offices

To effectively operate an American Legion Boys State, there certain services are needed for the well-being of the citizens and staff. They are the support offices that provide the services and materials necessary to conduct the program. These offices vary by program and resources. Some of the offices may combine responsibilities and some are dependent upon the number of citizens in the American Legion Boys State program. The following are some recommended offices:

- Headquarters or Administrative Office: This office is the hub of the operation. It is in this office that a master file of citizens is maintained capturing each citizen's city, party, room number and a copy of the citizen's original application and forms.**
- American Legion Boys State Bank: The operation of a bank is recommended. Actual detailed operation of a bank varies from state to state;**

however, it is recommended that the bank be in operation as quickly as possible after the students arrive.

- **Public Relations Office and Photographer:** The importance of telling the American Legion Boys State story to media and the general public is obvious. It is important that this office be properly staffed with those who understand media relations and have the skills necessary to make the program's public relations effort a success.
- **The Registration Line:** Thorough organization is important, for it is during the registration process that the first and lasting impression of American Legion Boys State is made. It should be well planned to facilitate quick and effective registration of citizens. Be sure that adequate staff is on hand and that they are thoroughly briefed about the program.

The Political Organization

An effective political organization is created in each American Legion Boys State program which operates from the precinct through state level. The government organization usually provides for such features as city, county and state elections held at a designated time or staggered throughout the program.

The citizens are organized into two political parties. Most of the programs use the titles "Federalists" and "Nationalists" for their parties. It is recommended that roommates be assigned to different parties. To implement this, the citizens should be assigned to a city and to a room prior to their arrival at American Legion Boys State.

Following is an explanation of the various components of a political organization that can be applied to any American Legion Boys State program.

- **Precincts:** Organization of this component varies. In several programs, the city is also considered a precinct. Like all components, it should mirror the governmental organization of that host state.
- **City:** Citizens are assigned to the several cities of American Legion Boys State and most activities revolve around the city structure. It is important to have a well-organized city structure with knowledgeable city counselors for they have the closest contact with the citizens.
- **County:** The number of cities assigned to a particular county is left to the discretion of the individual programs. Some of the smaller programs do not have a full-time counselor assigned at the county level.

- **Judicial:** This also varies with each program; however, its organization should mirror the respective individual state. Some programs license citizens as attorneys after having them complete bar exams. Visiting members of the actual bar often assist with this component.
- **Legislative:** Variations once again exist by program and should too mirror each individual state.

The Instructional Program

Instructional programs of American Legion Boys State programs will vary. The primary responsibility of the program is to teach state government from the municipal to the state level. To assist with this teaching, a general manual or guide is considered a necessity. This publication should contain a detailed program. It is recommended that this manual be furnished the citizens upon registration, if not before.

It is also recommended that an Instructor Manual and/or Counselors Guide be prepared. This manual would be based on the daily programs and describe the detailed each activities of each day. This manual would also include a crisis response plan.

Many American Legion Boys State programs use a government manual that is either developed specifically for the program or an existing resource publication already in existence. Some programs use general assemblies to instruct on all phases of government, utilizing government officials, teachers or others who are knowledgeable on the operation of the government. It is recommended that as much individual instruction as possible take place.

It is recommended that each American Legion Boys State program include in their course of instruction a detailed explanation and instruction on the legislative, executive, and judicial procedures of their respective state government.

It is also recommended that an assembly be conducted early in the program involving all citizens to provide a brief lesson in parliamentary procedure. Again, a publication or handout is recommended and readily available from a variety of sources.

Several American Legion Boys State programs conduct special schools. It is recommended that schools of instruction stimulate interest in the various governmental functions within the program's respective state. Examples of special American Legion Boys State schools are:

- **Law School with a Bar Examination.** A special school held for those citizens interested in the law. At the completion of the school, a State Bar

examination is given to the graduates. No person should be allowed to practice law or conduct or defend any action in any court of American Legion Boys State until he has passed the Bar Exam and obtained a license to practice.

- **Public Safety Course or Training.** This training is conducted either through police training academies and/or a course in objective training, both under the direction of State Police or State Troopers who are assigned to the program by the Department of Public Safety.
- **Functional Activities.** This segment of training begins with a caucus or other method for nominating candidates of city offices and culminates with election and inauguration of the Governor. This is usually the heart of the instructional program – the functional activities of citizenship practice. The activities take a considerable portion of the time allotted for instructional purposes and constitutes the chief means through which the citizens “learn by doing.”

Operation of Government Duties of Officers

Individual responsibilities and duties of officers will vary with among individual American Legion Boys State programs. They are, however, generally patterned after the duties of the elected officials within that state.

Again, appropriate instruction is important so that the citizens elected or selected for various offices have an understanding of those responsibilities.

State Government – Legislative, executive, and judicial branches function throughout the vast majority of American Legion Boys States. These are naturally limited until certain elections are held, then intensive operations take place until the end of the American Legion Boys State program. All elective and appointive officials usually serve in parallel capacity to state officials in the regular political setup. All boards, commissions, and other state agencies function in the same manner.

County Government – All county officials, boards and commissions typically perform all duties and services required of such individuals in the respective states.

City Government – City government may be a mayoral, city manager, alderman or commission form of government. Most American Legion Boys State cities function with a mayoral and council form of government, functioning with a full complement of officials, boards, etc.

State Legislature – All branches are properly organized and supervised by competent instructors or supervisors. Bills are introduced, debated and acted upon in accordance with regular legislative procedures. The legislature should be fully organized and meet regularly following the election of members and until the close of American Legion Boys State. Statutes governing the various phases of the American Legion Boys State government should be enacted and each of the respective American Legion Boys State Constitutions should be based upon their respective state constitution.

Courts – All courts should be established, fully organized and functioning as soon as possible. Each American Legion Boys State generally pattern their judicial system after the judicial system of their respective state. It is recommended that all judicial records of the program be preserved. Courts should be handled by individuals who are thoroughly experienced in jurisprudence and court procedures. American Legion Boys States should take advantage of opportunities presented by Bar Associations that will provide qualified lawyers to demonstrate courtroom procedures.

It is recommended that formal inauguration ceremonies be conducted for all elected officers; however, the installation of the state officers should be one of the highlights of the entire week. The inauguration should be impressive, and should be held before all the citizens, as well as many state, county and city dignitaries as can be assembled for the occasion. It is recommended that the governor of an American Legion Boys State program be administered their oath of office by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of their respective state and an address by the governor is an appropriate item to include on the program. Naturally, the newly installed American Legion Boys State governor should also be given appropriate time. A little thought and planning of this important phase of the program can develop into the highlight of this young man's life and be a memorable event to the entire program. It is also highly recommended that The American Legion be an integral part of this session.

The Recreation Program

Portions of each day may be devoted to planned, supervised recreation. This includes an organized athletic program under a qualified Athletic Director. If desired, athletic contests leading to championships may be held. Other optional items in this area might also include a band and/or chorus with a recognized Director of Music having responsibility for this activity.

Special Features

There are many activities that can enhance a American Legion Boys State curriculum. The inclusion of these features depends upon the overall program and the facilities and talent available to an American Legion Boys

State program. The following are some examples of special feature activities:

- **Newsletter/newspaper:** A American Legion Boys State newsletter or newspaper, staffed by citizens and supervised closely by a qualified member of the staff, is an excellent addition to activities at an American Legion Boys State. The actual number of editions published is a decision made by each respective program.
- **Educational and Instructional Trips:** The location of the program and its proximity to state memorials, shrines or other points of interest determine the feasibility of such trips. It is recommended that, if practical, the entire group of students have the opportunity to visit the State Capitol of their respective state. If possible, hold a session(s) of a American Legion Boys State General Assembly in the actual state's chambers used by the regularly elected officials of their state. Another suggestion might be visits to military installations in the area.
- **Memorial Service:** It is recommended that each American Legion Boys State conduct an inter-denominational memorial service at some point during their program. Religious devotions may also be conducted; however, care should be taken to include and not offend those of different faiths.
- **Contests and Awards:** The awarding of forms of recognition for competitions conducted during the week is generally decided by each American Legion Boys State program.
- **Simulated Naturalization Ceremony:** Many American Legion Boys State programs plan and conduct a simulated naturalization ceremony for non-US citizens participating in the program in order to make them "honorary citizens" of their American Legion Boys State. This provides opportunity for providing non-US students an extensive orientation of what citizenship in our states and nation means.

Other Items for Consideration

An effort has been made in the previous pages to outline some standard guidelines. Consideration may also be given to several other areas of planning in order to complete plans for a successful program.

Adequate insurance protection is an absolute must. Health and accident insurance should cover the citizens and staff from the time they leave their home until their return. Of course, American Legion Boys States should protect themselves with appropriate liability insurance coverage.

Risk mitigation practices and risk management policies are of utmost importance. The National Headquarters of The American Legion offers an online guidance manual titled *Risk Management Policies Of The American Legion For The Enhanced Protection Of Children And Youth* that is available for download at legion.org/publications.

Certain items may be furnished to the citizens upon their arrival at American Legion Boys State. These might include a program t-shirt which is for many American Legion Boys States, considered the “uniform of the day.” In those cases where wearing the shirt is required, one shirt is generally not sufficient. It is also desirable that a special shirt be provided members of the staff so that they may be easily identified. For many years Emblem Sales Division has worked with the various programs to make many of the items needed for a successful program available.

Name tags are an absolute necessity and should show the citizen’s name and his American Legion Boys State “city.” Some programs have different colored tags for the political parties. These tags can have many purposes but are particularly helpful for identification. Certificates and American Legion Boys State lapel pins are recommended for presentation at graduation ceremonies.

It is recommended that a complete system of records and files be maintained in each of the American Legion Boys State programs. The records should be preserved for future reference. Records and proceedings of American Legion Boys State meetings can be provided to their state agencies to show the involvement of the citizens and their attention to state issues.

Qualifications for Citizens of an American Legion Boys State Program

The longstanding resolution previously giving the national Americanism Commission authority to enforce mandates for American Legion Boys State eligibility and participation dissolved when Public Law 112-66 amended the federal charter of The American Legion. With that change, American Legion departments now possess authority for establishing their own criteria for eligibility, selection, participation, and operation of their respective American Legion Boys State program.

The following selection criteria is not mandated, but is strongly recommended for consideration:

- That any participant who has previously attended an American Legion Boys State program is not eligible to return to attend a second session as a American Legion Boys State citizen.

- **Selecting youth to attend American Legion Boys State having the highly desirable attributes of potential leadership ability, above average scholastic standing and an interest in the governmental processes.**
- **All prospective American Legion Boys State citizens should be proud of American citizenship and traditions, with a clear understanding of our heritage. A prospective American Legion Boys State citizen should express unhesitating willingness and pride in rendering appropriate honors to the Flag of the United States and the National Anthem at all times during the American Legion Boys State program.**

Selection of American Legion Boys State Citizens

It is strongly urged that the selection of an American Legion Boys State citizen should not be the result of a relationship with members of The American Legion or school officials or others involved in the selection process. In the actual selection of students, merit and ability should be the basis for the selection.

It is strongly recommended that the selection procedure should be for a school to recommend several suggested students for a post and/or district to sponsor, and that American Legion officials then select their group of representatives from that list. It is strongly urged that the school NOT be allowed to make the final decision as to who is selected to attend a American Legion Boys State program.

American Legion Boys Nation

The national Americanism Commission continues to have authority for oversight of the American Legion Boys Nation program. Resolution No. 30 of the National Executive Committee, October 2020, establishes that each American Legion Boys State program may send two citizens of their and/or their department's choosing to attend American Legion Boys Nation the same year of selection. The resolution further mandates that citizens attending American Legion Boys Nation must be between their junior and senior years of high school and have one or two semesters of high school remaining. Through yearly evaluations of the American Legion Boys Nation program it has been found that graduates of current American Legion Boys States are better able to be completely absorbed into the total program and are better able to return to their high schools and apply their experience more effectively.

American Legion Boys Nation is considered a once only graduate-type training in American citizenship at the national level. Two students are selected from each of the various programs to represent his own American Legion Boys State.

Departments and/or American Legion Boys State programs evaluating citizens to attend American Legion Boys Nation are strongly urged to select those who during their American Legion Boys State experience displayed exceptional qualities of maturity, initiative, leadership, enthusiasm, good interpersonal skills and a genuine desire to learn.

It is emphasized that no effort should be spared by the governing bodies and/or directors of each American Legion Boys State program in selecting their representatives to American Legion Boys Nation. It is strongly urged that the selection of American Legion Boys Nation senators is not automatic or predetermined, and not be considered a “prize.” It is strongly recommended that all finalists appear before a review board during American Legion Boys State to discuss The American Legion, its aims, and its principles.

It should be thoroughly understood that no other program in the world is like American Legion Boys Nation. No school, college, club, convention, or other activity can compare. It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the young men who are selected. From approximately 19,000 students who attend the American Legion Boys State programs, only 100 have the opportunity to attend American Legion Boys Nation. They are representing millions of young men from all over the United States, and they are representatives of their respective American Legion Boys State program and American Legion department. These burgeoning statesmen will become the leaders in industry, business, research, the military and in our government at all levels –community, state and nation.