

Guidance for Leagues on Candidates Unwilling to Participate in Voter Education Opportunities

<https://www.lwv.org/league-management/elections-tools/guidance-leagues-candidates-unwilling-participate-voter-education>

Every year Leagues hold hundreds of candidate debates and forums and produce hundreds of voters' guides across the country to help voters learn about the candidates on their ballot. Unfortunately, there are some candidates that refuse to participate in these voter education activities and call into question the League's reputation. Use below guidance and message points to help shape the public narrative and news coverage of these situations. For additional information about planning a debate, [see our debates and forums FAQ](#) and our [voters' guides best practices](#).

Are candidates refusing to participate in your debates or voters' guide? These points can help:

Recent focus groups confirm that the public does NOT look favorably on candidates that try to duck debates. The public also trusts the League of Women Voter's reputation for providing unbiased information to voters. If candidates refuse to participate in your activities, it's important for the League to speak up. Try these points:

- When candidates refuse to participate in opportunities to help their future constituents learn more about them, this is a **loss for voters**.
- The League of Women Voters has a long history of conducting candidate forums, but this isn't about the League: it's about voters. We want to provide a platform for voters to learn about who will be on their ballot. That's why we are particularly concerned about candidates who refuse to (show up and debate OR participate in voters' guides.
- Candidates running for public office are applying for a job. Debates are like job interviews, and the voters are hiring. Who would hire an employee without interviewing them first?

- When a candidate decides to not (attend OR participate), it is a lost opportunity for all voters. Declining an opportunity to discuss the issues that matter most to voters is contrary to the public interest."
- Research conducted on voter behavior and participation shows that not only does the public expect candidates to participate in voter education activities, but it also found that voters are more likely to vote when they know who the candidates are and where they stand on the issues. So when candidates choose not to participate, it's the voters that are harmed."

Also, take this opportunity to remind the community of all of the valuable voter service work you do for voters: candidate forums, voters' guides and voter registration activities. Tell the story of the impact you have year in and year out.

Consider including some of your history – e.g. you've provided **X** valuable services (registration, debates or voters' guides) for your community since **X** date and **X** voters have traditionally benefited from these voter education opportunities each year – and what your plans were for this year – e.g. the debate was going to be televised by **X** so all voters in the community would be able to tune in or **X** number of voters would receive the voters' guide.

Also consider undertaking an action campaign, just like you would on any other issue, asking members and the public at-large to contact the candidates to ask them to reply to your voters' guide or participate in your debate. People can contact the candidates via phone and email, but they can also do it publicly by tweeting at the candidates and/or posting to their Facebook page. If you're going to use Facebook and Twitter, be sure you have lots of people lined up, including your coalition members, etc.