

League of Women Voters of the Akron Area

Candidate Forum Guidelines

Prior to local primary and general elections, the LWVAA sponsors candidate forums. The LWVAA has determined that the forum format is the least complicated to plan and carry out, and consequently has developed the forum guidelines listed below. An additional set of guidelines for candidate debates may be developed at a later date. All Leagues bear the responsibility of safeguarding the policy of nonpartisanship, and the organization's nonpartisan reputation.

Seating candidates

1. All Summit County Board of Elections-certified candidates for selected local races are invited to participate in the primary and general election forums. All candidates are allowed to make timed opening statements, and take questions as time permits. If there are only two candidates and one cannot attend, we allow the one attending candidate to participate. Unopposed candidates are invited.
2. Forum invitations are sent to candidates in a traceable form. The LWVAA subscribes to the VOTE411.org software program wherein candidate email addresses are verified. The Voter Service Co-Chair receives a copy of each candidate's forum invitation as it is sent, and retains that copy until after the election. When a candidate's email address cannot be verified, an invitation is sent to that candidate by certified mail through the U.S. Postal Service.
3. Candidates are asked to RSVP to the forum invitation by a specified date; the candidate may RSVP via a link to an LWVAA member's email address or via the telephone voice-message system at the LWVAA office. The RSVP information is provided in the forum invitation and on the LWVAA website shortly before the scheduled event.
4. Candidates who advise the LWVAA by the RSVP deadline that they are unable to attend the forum are invited to submit a brief statement that in their absence will be read by the moderator at the beginning of the forum. No one may speak for the candidate in the event of the candidate's absence.
5. The initial invitation to participate advises candidates that if they fail to respond to the forum invitation, or fail to respond by the RSVP deadline, the forum schedule will be planned around their absence. The printed forum program will indicate a candidate's absence, and no table tent name card for the candidate will be printed.
6. Candidates who unexpectedly appear at a forum will not be seated with other candidates running for the same office. Such a candidate will be allowed to present a timed statement about his/her candidacy at the end of the evening, if time permits. The moderator will inform the audience at the beginning of the forum of the addition to the program due to the arrival of the unexpected candidate. If an unexpected candidate appears after the forum has begun, the moderator will, at first opportunity, inform the audience of the candidate's arrival.

7. The forum guidelines are clearly spelled out in the forum invitation to candidates, as well as placed on the LWVAA website shortly before the scheduled event.

Forum format

1. The forum is not a debate. No interaction or debate among candidates is planned. A forum consists of candidates responding to questions submitted by the League, forum co-sponsors, and the audience, and presented by the moderator. There will be no planned opportunities for a candidate to respond to other candidates.
2. A nonpartisan, experienced event moderator is selected by the LWVAA to preside over each candidate forum. The moderator maintains order and decorum while offering all candidates a fair and equal opportunity to answer audience questions.
3. In order to prevent duplication, inappropriate language, or personal attacks, audience questions are screened by a minimum of two screeners, an LWVAA member and, if possible, a co-sponsor committee member, before being delivered to the moderator.
4. Qualified timekeepers are visible to the moderator and candidates, and indicate the amount of time remaining for a candidate's answer, as well as the exact time to stop. The amounts of time for candidate opening and closing statements and question responses are announced by the moderator at the outset of the forum when the moderator presents the ground rules.
5. In the event that there are a large number of candidates running for office, the format of the candidate forum may be changed to a "meet and greet" or similar type of format.

Forum ground rules

1. Candidates, volunteers, and audience members are not permitted to wear campaign clothing, hats, buttons or other similar items inside the forum auditorium. Also not permitted are name badges worn by elected officials indicating their elected position. Blank name tags, to be filled in by candidates are provided by LWVAA at the sign-in table.
2. Candidate campaign literature may be displayed on tables set up outside the forum auditorium.
3. No filming or recording of any kind is permitted or shared during the forum except by League-authorized media representatives.
4. Candidates may not use any forum video clips, photographs, or audio recordings for their campaigns.

Forum planning

1. The LWVAA makes a concerted effort to invite diverse nonpartisan community groups to co-sponsor candidate forums. Such community groups are asked to verify their nonpartisan status and their willingness to work within the LWVAA forum guidelines.

2. The LWVAA Voter Service Co-Chair leads a planning committee comprised of LWVAA and co-sponsor volunteers well in advance of each forum.

3. The forum committee responsibilities include: reserving the venue, encouraging candidate response and participation, designing and printing the program, publicizing the forum, and enlisting volunteers to assist at the event.

8/1/2019