League of Women Voters Of Mason County

Candidate Forum and Speed Dating with the Candidates Policy

The purpose of candidate forums and events is to educate voters about candidates' views on issues and to stimulate voter interest and participation in the election. League of Women Voters of Mason County (LWVMC) prefers to hold Candidate Forums and Speed Dating with the Candidates events. These differ from a debate, as there is no back-and-forth conversation or rebuttal between the candidates in an LWVMC Forum or Speed Dating with the Candidates event.

Candidate forums, debates and events are regulated by federal, state and county election laws and regulations. In addition, League-sponsored forums and events are governed still further by the League's own nonpartisan policy.

The LWVMC is designated a 501(c)(4) by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The League of Women Voters Washington (LWVWA) Education Fund is designated 501(c)(3).

In order to comply with League policies and regulatory requirements and to meet our goal of voter education, LWVMC will:

1. **Enforce the nonpartisan policy of the League.**
The League of Women Voters shall not support or oppose any political party or any candidate. LWVMC will sponsor and conduct forums and Speed Dating with the Candidates in such a way as to avoid creating the impression that the League favors one candidate over another.

2. **Follow all appropriate government regulations.**
Key Regulations include the following:
IRS Requirements

IRS rules apply to debates and forums sponsored by organizations designated as 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) by the IRS. As noted above, LWVMC is designated 501(c)(4) by the IRS. The LWVWA

Education Fund is designated 501(c)(3). When using LWVWA Education Fund funds, the LWVMC must abide by education fund rules.

501(c)(3)organizations "may not participate or intervene, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office."

501(c)(3) organizations may sponsor nonpartisan voter education projects, such as forums, providing that there is fair and impartial treatment of all candidates, with nothing that promotes or advances one candidate over another.

3. **Minimize "empty chair" forums.**
If only one candidate in a contested election accepts a forum invitation, or candidates cancel a forum appearance leaving only one participant, the result is called and "empty chair" forum. Although empty chair forums are not expressly prohibited by the IRS, the agency might well consider such an event to be an improper electioneering activity.
   - LWVMC will not present a forum or Speed Dating with the Candidates event with just one candidate but may combine several related positions into one event to ensure there are a minimum of two candidates.
   - If a candidate fails to appear or cancels at the last moment, still leaving more than one candidate, an announcement should be made during candidate introductions, without explanation of the reason(s) that the candidate is not participating.

4. **Include appropriate candidates in LWVMC forums and Speed Dating with the Candidates**
   - The candidate must be listed on the ballot for the upcoming election.
   - The candidate must have made a public announcement of an intention to run and/or have filed financial reports if required by the Washington State Public Disclosure.
   - Write-in candidates may be considered for inclusion at the discretion of the LWVMC. They must have officially filed a Declaration of Candidacy and paid any fees. If a write-in candidate participates in a forum, the moderator must announce in advance that the write in candidate's name will not appear on the ballot.

5. **Communicate regularly and equitably with all candidates.**
   - LWVMC will communicate with all eligible candidates in the same way at the same time about event planning and procedures. Telephone, email, text, USPS can be used to communicate with the candidates.
   - Notice of candidates not in attendance will be presented in a neutral fashion.
   - Candidates will be asked the same questions in the same order and be given the same amount of time for responses. When possible, questions will be compiled with input from the community.
   - Forum dates and times will be communicated broadly to the media and public.