

Guidelines for Organizing a Candidate Forum

(Adapted from League of Women Voters best practices)

Purpose of a Candidate Forum

A candidate forum provides a neutral, structured opportunity for voters to hear directly from candidates about their positions, priorities, and qualifications. Forums should promote informed participation in the democratic process while maintaining strict nonpartisanship.

Core Principles

- Nonpartisanship: The forum must not support or oppose any candidate or political party.
- Fairness: All qualified candidates must be invited and treated equally.
- Transparency: Rules, format, and expectations should be communicated clearly in advance.
- Civility: The tone should remain respectful and focused on issues, not personalities.

Planning the Forum

1. Determine Scope and Format

- Identify which races will be included.
- Choose format: moderated Q&A, panel, or town hall.
- Set time limits (60–90 minutes).

2. Invite Candidates

- Invite all qualified candidates from all parties.
- Include date, time, format, and RSVP deadline.

3. Select a Moderator

- Neutral, respected individual.
- Enforces rules and timing.

Forum Structure

- Opening: Welcome, rules, introductions.
- Opening Statements: Equal time.
- Questions: Screened and fair, rotate order.
- Rebuttals (optional): Equal opportunity.
- Closing Statements: Equal time.

Question Guidelines

- Focus on issues and qualifications.
- Avoid personal attacks or partisan framing.

Logistics

- Accessible venue with sound system.
- Visit the venue to determine the setup, how many tables and chairs needed and their placement, microphones and podium
- Timing tools and timekeeper.
- Audience guidelines (no disruptions).
- Tech setup for virtual/hybrid.

Supplies & Materials Checklist

- ☐ Microphones, speakers
- ☐ Podium/table, chairs
- ☐ Timers or use a cell phone
- ☐ Name placards for candidates
- ☐ Agenda and rules
- ☐ Index cards for questions
- ☐ Sign-in sheets at entrance
- ☐ Moderator tools
- ☐ Script for moderator
- ☐ Question list for candidates
- ☐ Pens
- ☐ Timing cue cards
- ☐ Vote411 tablecloth
- ☐ LWVOP large banner
- ☐ Glasses and water for the candidates
- ☐ Directional signage, if needed
- ☐ Tape, scissors
- ☐ Trash bins

Voter Engagement Materials

- ☐ Voter registration forms - Various Elections Office Brochures
- ☐ Poster with QR codes to register to vote and stand
- ☐ Election info

Roles to be filled

- **Presiding:** usually the league President will welcome audience, make announcements, do the closing
- **1 Moderator**
- **2 Greeters:** welcome people as they arrive and hand out question cards and pencils.
- **2 Question Collectors:** gather questions and submits them to the questions screeners
- **1 Timekeeper**

- **2 Question screener/sorters**
- **Vote411 Rep**
- **Photographer**
- **Volunteers to set up LWV signage and election literature table**
- **Publicity:** Communications team

Comfort & Accessibility

- Water
- ADA accommodations

Technology & Recording

- Camera, tripod
- Streaming setup
- Wi-Fi/hotspot
- Chargers

Room Setup Supplies

- Tablecloths
- Directional signage, if needed
- Tape, scissors
- Trash bins

Handling Challenges

- No-shows: proceed without substitute
- Disruptions: moderator restores order
- Rule violations: warning, enforce limits

After the Forum

- Share recording
- Provide resources
- Thank candidates for participating
- Gather feedback