

League Candidate Forums in Primary Elections:

Guiding Principles and Best Practices

When planning candidate forums during primary elections, the League must ensure that all activities align with its core commitment to nonpartisanship. The structure of forums should never advantage or disadvantage any candidate or political party.

Primary elections are contests within a political party. Voters are selecting among candidates from the same party to determine their nominee for the general election. Forum structure should reflect this purpose.

Recommended Approach: Separate Forums by Party

- Hold separate forums for each party's primary (e.g., one for Democratic candidates, one for Republican candidates).
- Invite all qualified candidates within that party's primary.
- Ensure identical formats across all forums, including timing, questions, and rules.
- Focus discussion on differences among candidates within the same party.
- Use neutral methods (such as random draws) to determine speaking order.

Rationale for Separate Forums: Separating forums by party keeps the focus on the purpose of the primary election and allows voters to make informed comparisons among candidates competing for the same nomination. It also reduces the risk of perceived bias and helps maintain the League's nonpartisan credibility.

Combined Forums: Limitations and Considerations

- Combined forums including candidates from multiple parties are generally not recommended for primary elections.
- They may shift focus away from intra-party decision-making.
- They can create perceived imbalance if one party has more candidates participating than another.
- They may unintentionally advantage or disadvantage candidates through format or interaction.

When a Combined Forum May Be Appropriate

Combined forums may be appropriate in limited circumstances, such as nonpartisan races (e.g., school board or municipal elections) or when logistical constraints make separate events impractical. In such cases, extra care must be taken to ensure fairness, equal treatment, and clarity of purpose.

Conclusion

For primary elections, the preferred and most widely accepted League practice is to hold separate forums by party. This approach best supports informed voter decision-making while upholding the League's strict commitment to nonpartisanship.