

Guide to Getting More Candidates to Respond

Candidate pressure campaigns for VOTE411 are focused on encouraging candidates to submit their responses to your voter guide. You can build this into your entire voter guide process - from writing candidate questions, communicating with candidates, and asking your community to help.

This guide is meant for you, as a VOTE411 Admin, to pick which areas you want to strengthen this election season. You may not be able to take on all these strategies this year, but you can add one or two this election season to increase candidate response rates.

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#1) WRITING CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

When writing candidate questions, you should aim to ask questions on issues that are important to voters in your area. Writing biased or leading questions can cause candidates (and even voters) to feel targeted for what they believe and prevent candidates from answering your questions.

The most common issue we see with candidate questions is sharing an opinion or giving background before the question. You should simply ask the question and let the candidates answer.

Example: *The Moore v Harper ruling caused a trigger law to ban abortion in our state and now residents cannot access abortion services and healthcare. What would you do to help women in our state receive more abortion services?*

The example question has a preamble to it and the question assumes that the candidate thinks residents should receive more abortion care. Better questions may be:

- What is your position on the right of privacy of the individual to make reproductive choices?
- What is your position on our state's abortion trigger law?
- What, if any, policies you would support to increase women's healthcare access in our state?

Beyond the content of the question, you should also consider the number of questions you ask. Candidates are busy campaigning so if they see a big block of questions they may not respond. We find that asking 3-5 questions garners the greatest response rates from candidates.

Lastly, consider which office you are writing questions for. A question on voting rights may be a great fit for a state legislative candidate, but ill-fitting for a school board candidate. Think about what policies or constituents that office impacts when writing your questions.

For more tips on writing unbiased questions, check out LWVUS' guide: [Are your Voters' Guide Questions as Unbiased as You Think?](#) If you need additional assistance in reviewing or writing your candidate questions, email us at VOTE411Help@lwv.org.

#2) WRITING CANDIDATE INVITES

Another way to get higher response rates is to write a clear invitation email or letter.

- **Include a specific deadline.** This gives candidates a deadline to complete it, and later you can send them a "Last Chance" reminder email through VOTE411 which will help motivate some to respond on the last day before you publish.
- **Consider sharing how many voters used your guide in the last election year** to encourage them to respond.
- **Put their candidate response link toward the top of the invite** so they don't have to search for it.
- **Include your voter guide coordinator's contact information**, so they know who to reach out to with questions.

You can find an example invitation email in **Appendix A**.

#3) COMMUNICATING WITH CANDIDATES

Send the invite to candidates as soon as you have your questions assigned to your candidates in VOTE411. The sooner you get the invitations out, the more likely they are to respond. They get busier campaigning as Election Day nears.

Other tips for candidate communications:

- **How often should I remind them?** We recommend reminding candidates once per week through the VOTE411 system. You can include:
 - A “Last Chance” reminder a day before your publishing deadline
 - A “You still have time to fill it out” reminder after publishing.
 - Once a week reminders after that.
- **What if the email invite goes to their spam folder?** The email invite may end up in some candidates’ spam folder or Promotions folder, depending on their filters. We recommend sending a bulk BCC (blind carbon copy) email from your League’s email account to candidates to notify them that there is an email invite waiting for them. This will usually hit their inbox if the invite through VOTE411 did not.
- **What are other ways to contact candidates?**
 - Call them! It’s especially effective to recruit League members in the candidates’ districts to make the call.
 - Text the candidates. Sometimes the candidates are too busy to check their voicemail. Sending them a quick text can help bypass this.
 - Message them on Facebook to let them know an email invite has been sent.
- **What can I tell them to motivate them to fill it out?**
 - Share how many voters used your guide in the last election cycle.
 - Share how you are marketing to voters. “We’re starting our Facebook ads next week and the colleges will be promoting it, so this would be a great time for you to fill it out.”

In **Appendix B**, you can find a script and FAQs for volunteers when they call, email, or message candidates.

#4) STRATEGIZING YOUR CANDIDATE OUTREACH

There may be dozens, hundreds, or thousands of candidates in your voter guide, and you cannot always do additional outreach to all of those who didn’t respond to your invite. You may need to come up with a strategy on which candidates get a follow-up call, text, or personal email.

We recommend focusing on these candidates:

- **Candidates in contested races.** Some Leagues invite candidates in uncontested races to fill out their voter guide questions, and other Leagues only put the basic information for them on VOTE411 (Name, Race, Party). If you have invited candidates in uncontested races, consider putting those to the bottom of your additional outreach list. Voters will be more interested in those candidates that have an opponent.
- **Candidates who are not in districted races first,** starting with those at the top of the ticket. This could be starting with a governor’s race before moving on to state legislative districts, or starting your outreach with the at-large county commission race before the districted county commission race. Think about which races will appear on more users’ ballots which will have the biggest reach.

- **Candidates in larger user areas.** Which races will impact the most voters? You may want to focus on a legislative or municipal district in a more populated area of your guide's coverage or a district where you've had more voter guide users in past elections. **Candidates in hotly contested races.** Do you have an interesting school board race or an exciting mayoral race this year? See if you can focus your candidate outreach energy there first.

Creating this strategy can be helpful, especially if you have a large number of candidates in your guide. You want to start with those races that will reach the most voters and then move on from there.

#5) LEANING ON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

You work all year with your members and community, and you can use these relationships to encourage more candidate responses to your voter guide.

- **Remind candidates at your debates and forums to submit responses.** Give your forum volunteers the list of candidates who have not yet responded to ask the candidates in-person at the event.
- **Ask League members in a candidate's district to request they fill it out.** Some League members know candidates or know someone who knows the candidates. Many times, it's that personal touch that encourages that candidate to submit their responses. They don't want to disappoint the people they know.
- **Share your guide with your local election officials.** Many voters turn to the local election office for their election information. If you build a relationship with your local election officials, they may help spread the word for you to voters and candidates.
- **Share your guide with the local parties.** Sometimes the parties will contact candidates to encourage them to answer your questions. Just be sure you give all parties the same opportunity for outreach.
- **Continue meeting with candidates to build relationships with them.** Ask them to speak at your issues forums, invite them to your community events, and treat them like neighbors.

Many candidates are running for office for the first time and may be overwhelmed with campaigning, especially those local candidates. They might need additional support from your volunteer team and relationship-building to get them to respond.

#6) TAKING YOUR CAMPAIGN PUBLIC

Promoting your guide is a great way to run an effective pressure campaign. Use your public platforms to remind voters to ask candidates to fill out the guide. [Here is sample language for voters when they contact candidates](#), and here's a simple way to write about VOTE411 to include the call to action:

“Our nonpartisan voter guide for the [2022 General Election] can be found on VOTE411.org. Simply enter your address to compare your candidates and read their responses to our questions. If a candidate has not responded, please contact them to ask them to fill it out! You deserve to know where they stand on the issues.”

Below are some strategies you can use to communicate it to the public:

1. **Add language to your website.** If you have a website, consider adding a VOTE411 page that includes a call to action for voters to reach out to their candidates to respond to your invitation.
2. **Add it to any VOTE411 social media post.** “If you see a candidate has not responded to our questions, please contact them and ask them to fill it out!”
3. **Put the call to action in your member emails and e-newsletters.**
4. **Include it in media interviews and add it to your press releases.** Prep your League leaders so they know to add this call to action in their media interviews.
5. **Post an action on League in Action.** Using this relational organizing platform, you can create language for your supporters to text or email the candidates themselves.

This public campaign works! We often hear from candidates who reach out after a handful of voters contact them (often as little as five contacts). Getting the voters to ask candidates to respond is an effective tool to increase response rates.

If you have questions on how to start using League in Action or creating language for an action, you can reach out to the organizing team at organizing@lwv.org.

#7) PARTNERING WITH LOCAL MEDIA

A great way to encourage more candidates to complete the guide is by partnering with a local media company who purchases your candidate information for their website. This partnership builds your guide’s visibility while giving candidates another reason to fill it out as it reaches more voters. Media partnerships are also a great fundraising tool for your League as you can charge the partner for your content.

If you set up a media partnership, you can put it in your email invite to candidates. “This year we are partnering with [MEDIA COMPANY] to reach even more voters with our voter guide.” This will encourage them to fill it out especially if it is a prominent news outlet.

Further, you can check with the media partner to see if they would send an email out to candidates who have not yet responded, because they have a stake in getting candidate responses now too! They could also use their connections to reach out to a specific candidate you really want a response from, like a state legislator or congressional candidate, to encourage them to fill it out. Media partners like this can be a great way to get more buy-in from candidates.

If you would like additional guidance on how to set up media partnerships, including a sample contract and pricing information, please email VOTE411Help@lwv.org.

STRATEGY CHECKLIST

- Write unbiased candidate questions
- Ask 3-5 candidate questions per race
- Include a publishing deadline in your candidate invitation
- Send regular reminders through VOTE411
- Send a bulk BCC (blind carbon copy) email from your League's email account to remind candidates in case any invites ended up in a candidate's spam folder
- Put together a candidate outreach strategy
- Remind candidates to fill out the voter guide at your candidate forums
- Ask League members to contact candidates in their districts who have not completed it
- Post a call to action on your communication channels, like on your website, in your newsletter, on your League in Action and across your social media channels
- Explore media partnerships

LWVUS RESOURCES

- [Are your Voters' Guide Questions as Unbiased as You Think?](#)
- [Voter Guides Best Practices](#)
- [Scripts for Voters to Contact Their Candidates](#)

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE CANDIDATE EMAIL INVITATION

Remember to update the deadline and character limit in the instructions at the bottom of the email.

Dear #candidate_name(),

Congratulations on becoming a candidate! The League of Women Voters of [LEAGUE NAME] invites you to participate in our [2022 GENERAL] Election Voter Guide. The Voter Guide provides invaluable, nonpartisan information for [LOCATION] voters.

Your answers will be published on VOTE411.org on [DEADLINE]. **To submit your information please use the online form at #response_link()**

VOTE411.org provides voters with information about the election process and allows you to speak directly to voters in your own words, on issues they care about. With over 102 years of experience educating voters, the League has an impeccable reputation for presenting thorough and impartial election information.

We are asking you to respond to [FOUR] questions on the topics voters in [MY LOCATION] are most interested in, as well as provide links to your campaign resources to provide voters with additional information on your campaign. **On average, answering these questions takes about 15 minutes of your time.**

Your responses and contact information will be available to voters 24/7 through an interactive, community specific online voter guide at VOTE411 and may be distributed by Leagues in your community in their local voter guides and through other print and online media.

Your participation in this activity does not constitute an endorsement by the League. This is purely an educational activity. No candidate may use the name of the League in any manner. Submittal of responses and biographical information constitutes agreement with the terms of this letter and the voter guide instructions.

If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact **Coordinator Name** (Email Address). Thank you for participating in this valuable resource!

Sincerely,

NAME

LWV Board President or Other Title

Submission Instructions

By participating in this activity sponsored by the LWV, a candidate agrees not to upload any libelous or slanderous statements or information. Nor shall a candidate upload copyrighted or other legally protected material without the permission of the owner of such material.

Word Count and Formatting: No editing of your answers will be done by the League of Women Voters, except to comply with space limitations and voter guide design layout. Candidates are limited to **750** characters (including spaces and punctuation). Your responses will be printed verbatim up to the character limit. The web form will count the characters for you and will tell you when you have reached the limit.

Photographs: You may submit a color or black and white “headshot” photograph for inclusion through VOTE411. The use of photographs in other print and online media is at the discretion of the League sanctioned publisher.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I be in VOTE411’s voter guide even if I don’t answer the questions? Your name and campaign profile information will be listed, followed by the notation: "The candidate has not yet responded." We strongly encourage you to participate.

When do I need to submit my responses? You may submit or edit your responses at any time, but the sooner responses are submitted, the sooner your information will be provided to voters. The League will be publishing the information on **DEADLINE**.

Will you edit my responses? No. Voters will read exactly what you submit.

Where will my information appear? Your information will be available on VOTE411.org and through other League sanctioned print or online resources.

What should my photograph look like? Your picture should be a closely cropped headshot (i.e., do not use a full-body or group shot).

How do I submit my responses? Please use the web form to share information about yourself and your views with voters: **#response_link()**

What questions will I see when I log in? All candidates will be asked to provide the following information. ***Do NOT answer in this email; use the web form.***

Contact Information

Name *[not editable]* contact LWV if incorrect

Party *[not editable]* contact LWV if incorrect

Contact Name (defaults to the candidate's name, can be a campaign manager or other designee)

Contact Email (defaults to the email submitted to the elections official or found online.) Please make sure this email is valid and that it is monitored regularly.

Picture - browse your computer and upload a photograph

Campaign Profile

Campaign Website

Campaign Email

Campaign Facebook

Campaign Twitter

Campaign Instagram

Campaign YouTube

Campaign Phone

Campaign Mailing Address **Questions:**

#question_list()

Do NOT answer in this email; use the web form.

TIPS

As you finish each response, save a copy of that answer on your computer. This will help avoid accidental data loss due to an unreliable internet connection or other technical problem. Even though you've clicked "Submit", you can still go back to change or complete your response at a later time.

Thank you for participating in the League of Women Voters Education Fund's VOTE411.org.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE VOLUNTEER SCRIPTS FAQs to Give Volunteers

Consider giving out FAQs to your volunteers so they know how to speak about VOTE411.

VOTE411 Coordinator: NAME

Contact Information: Phone/Email Address

Thank you for volunteering to contact candidates! There are XXX number of candidates in our guide, and the more candidates who fill out our guide, the more helpful it is for voters. This is the

first time some of the candidates are coming in contact with the League, so thank you for your patience with them if you have to explain who we are!

1. Voter Guide Background

- a. All candidates were invited by email address on DATE, or by letter invite if they did not have an email address available.
- b. Our voter guide was published on VOTE411 on DATE but candidates can fill out the guide at any point through their candidate link.
- c. Each candidate has their own unique candidate link to fill out the voter guide, so they must get an invite through VOTE411 to complete it.

2. Candidate Info

- a. **Will the candidate's email address we collect be shared widely?** No, this will be used to send the invite. They can update their profile with whatever bio info they want - email address, phone number or mailing address.
- b. **Where did the email invite get sent from?** messages-c2@thevoterguide.org
- c. **Does the League endorse candidates?** No, the League does not support or oppose candidates or parties. VOTE411 is an informational site for voters to easily compare candidate positions on issues.
- d. **Does the League edit candidate responses?** Candidates write their own answers to our questions through a unique invitation link. We do not edit any of the responses.

Call Script:

Volunteer: Hello, my name is XXXX and I'm a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of NAME. How are you?

Candidate Response: Good. How are you?

Volunteer: I'm good! I am calling to see if you received the email invite to fill out our VOTE411 voter guide that we sent on DATE?

- "Yes, but I haven't had a chance to fill it out."
- **Volunteer:** I know campaigning is really busy, but I hope you take the time to fill out our voter guide. Last year we reached xxxx number of voters and we only have [five] questions to fill out because we know how busy candidates are.
- **Candidate:** Will usually give reason why they haven't filled it out. Or say when they might fill it out.
- "No, I didn't see it."
- **Volunteer:** What is your best email address to send it to? I can have our coordinator send it to you again.
- **Candidate:** Gives email address.* (Volunteer: Repeat it back to them.)
- **Volunteer:** Thank you so much! Our Voter Guide Coordinator will send that to you from messages-c2@thevoterguide.org by tomorrow.

Volunteer: Thank you so much for your time and good luck on your campaign!

**Be sure to send the candidate's email address to your VOTE411 Coordinator so they can send a new invite to the candidate. If a candidate doesn't feel comfortable giving you their email address, you can always give them your VOTE411 Coordinator's contact information.*

Voicemail Message:

Hello, my name is NAME and I'm a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of XXX. We emailed you an invite on DATE to fill out our voter guide on VOTE411.org, and I wanted to make sure you received it. If you did not receive it, please call our VOTE411 Coordinator NAME at PHONE NUMBER. If you see our email, you can click the link, upload your photo, and fill out our 3-5 candidate questions. Thank you and have a great day!

Facebook:

Hello! I am with the League of Women Voters, and we sent you an email invite to fill out our voter guide on VOTE411.org on DATE. It came from messages-c2@thevoterguide.org. Please let me know if you need it emailed again!

Email:

Subject: Did you receive our voter guide invite?

Hi CANDIDATE NAME,
I am a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of XXXX, and I wanted to make sure you received the email invite to fill out our VOTE411.org voter guide. We emailed you from messages-c2@thevoterguide.org on DATE at this email address.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if you did not receive that email.

Thank you!

YOUR NAME

Thank you for your hard work on your voter guide!

If you have any questions or need additional support with your candidate pressure campaign, please contact VOTE411Help@lwv.org.

We appreciate you!

Megan, Isamar, and Whitney
LWVUS VOTE411 Team