



Candi-dating With Candidates Toolkit

January 2024

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Acknowledgments

The toolkit created by the League of Women Voters of Texas provided an invaluable resource in creating this document.

Overview

What is Candi-dating?

This is essentially speed dating for voters with candidates. Members of the public rotate from table to table and ask their questions directly to the candidates. After a given time period, the voters move to another table.

The format is useful when there are multiple contested races or many candidates for one race and/or if the slate of candidates is not well known. Also, if one or more candidates in a race does not participate in the event, the League can proceed to hold the roundtable and allow the attending candidate(s) in that race to participate since the candidates are not answering the same questions at the same time. Unopposed candidates may also participate.

Sample Agenda

1. Introduction, including reminding everyone of the League's nonpartisan policy and the rules of decorum (10 minutes)
2. Candidate opening statements (1 to 2 minutes each) – you can forgo this if you feel it is too much like a debate or there are many candidates attending from one party.
3. Roundtable discussions (15 to 25 minutes per candidate) – depending on the number of candidates.
4. Candidate summaries (1 to 2 minutes each) – again see caveat for number 2
5. Conclusion from the League (5 minutes)
6. Meet-and-Greet (30 minutes)

Note: Please also review the LWV-VA *Toolkit for Candidate Forums* for additional information and guidelines about planning candidate events.

I. Planning for the Event

Weeks before the event

1. Begin detailed planning activities at least four to six weeks prior to the event date.
2. Assign responsibilities and deadlines to members of the planning committee.
3. Consistent with LWV-VA's DEI commitment, secure an accessible location, convenient to the diverse voters being served, with needed space, tables, chairs, and equipment.
4. Contact candidates (see Sample Participation Rules & Agreement for Candidates in the Appendix):
 - Explain that the format allows direct interaction with voters and that a Meet-and-Greet will be held following the roundtable discussion.
 - Send and secure participation agreement.
5. Promote the event via social media, flyers, radio, or other media. Ask voters to come prepared to ask direct and thoughtful questions about the issues most important to them.

6. Recruit volunteers
 - Local League president or other League leader to serve as emcee (makes introduction and describes format).
 - A moderator for each table or roving members to assure no one person at a table monopolizes the time.
 - One timekeeper (to time the opening statements and roundtable discussions).
7. Print materials; obtain supplies and other equipment (see Appendix).
8. Arrange media/publicity/invitations to public.
 - Invite media to cover the event.
 - Arrange publicity through print and other media, including social media and public service announcements on radio and television. Place announcements in League newsletters and on VOTE411.org. Send promotional emails to co-sponsors and other organizations. Consider signs and banners for the forum venue, and posters or flyers to place in businesses or public places.
 - Invite members of the public with press releases, newspaper notices, emails to co-sponsors to invite their members, etc. Use a service that tracks RSVPs and allows you to print attendee lists for check in and send messages to guests – such as reminders and any changes of plan. LWV-VA uses Eventbrite.
9. Consider partnering with co-sponsors
 - Co-sponsors must understand that the League cannot waive any of its nonpartisanship policies and procedures. Co-sponsors cannot have endorsed or been affiliated with a candidate or ballot issue, nor should they have any plans to make any future endorsements.
 - The League should take the lead in contacting the candidates, negotiating disputes, and controlling the format. The League should provide the moderators or roving person to keep order and timekeeper or should approve of these in advance.
 - Co-sponsors may:
 - Participate in planning, finding facilities, obtaining media coverage, and providing volunteers.
 - Promote the event via their website, newsletter, and social media to encourage attendance.
 - Contribute monetarily, but this is not required.
 - Consider delineating the responsibilities in writing in advance with the co-sponsoring organization(s). Some groups that may be appropriate co-sponsors include, but are not limited to:
 - Local chapter of NAACP, LULAC, AARP, or AAUW
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - PTA
 - Neighborhood association
 - Law enforcement association
 - Civic club or organization
 - Environmental organization or garden club.

Day of the event

Prepare the room

- Arrange the room, placing round tables as far apart as possible.
- Prepare a registration table.
- Prepare a table for League and candidate campaign materials, preferably outside the room where the roundtable is taking place.
- Place/distribute signs, banners, candidate name tents and water bottles, and refreshments.

II. Holding the Event

Format and script

The introductions can include a 5-minute presentation in which the local League president (or designee) welcomes attendees, states the objectives of the forum, explains the League's nonpartisan policy, and introduces the voter services chair (or a nonpartisan guest). Next, the voter services chair can briefly discuss the races covered at the roundtable discussion and explain candi-dating.

Sample Welcome Script and Format Overview

Emcee:

Welcome! I'm [name], [title], with the League of Women Voters of [location]. The League is very glad that you are here. We hope that your participation in the roundtable discussions will achieve several objectives:

1. Increase voter-candidate engagement in our community.
2. Enhance your knowledge of candidate positions on the issues important to you in this election.
3. Provide you with the opportunity to have your voice heard and understand the power of your vote.

Give and take between voters and candidates over the issues is exactly what our founders had in mind when the League was formed more than a century ago in 1920. We commend these candidates for running for office, participating today, and being willing to tell us how they intend to improve our community through their public service.

The League of Women Voters of [location] is a nonpartisan, grassroots civic organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to people 16 and older of all gender identities. We welcome new members!

Now, please turn off your cell phones. No recording of this event is permitted except by our photographer/videographer. The restrooms are located [XXX].

I will now turn over the meeting to [name], our [title/role], who will provide an

overview of the races covered in this election and the event format.

Overview:

Tonight, we have candidates for the following offices: [name the candidates and office].

Before we start the roundtable discussions, we will ask each candidate to introduce themselves and state why they are running for office in a ___-minute, timed segment.

A candidate will then be seated at each table with a group of voters and one moderator [if using a moderator]. Each voter at the table will have a chance to ask the candidate one question. Please let everyone have an opportunity to speak – no soliloquies. Candidates, please keep your answers as brief as possible.

At the end of ___minutes, voters will move to another table. Candidates will remain where they are.

We will then have closing statements by the candidates (1 to 2 minutes each), followed by a very brief wrap-up by [the League president or other League leader].

Sample Script for Conclusion

- Closing statements: At this time, will all the candidates come forward to the head table? Each candidate will have two minutes to make a closing statement which sums up their discussions and take-away points. Candidates will speak in the order they appear on the ballot.
- Wrap-up: As we have listened and learned together, we have become more informed voters. We thank these candidates for the time, effort, and sacrifice that it has taken to bring each to this point in their candidacies. Let's show our appreciation with a big round of applause!

The voter handouts you received when you came in have websites for more information about voting. You'll find various deadlines, information about when/where/how you can vote, and where to find the League's nonpartisan Voters Guide at VOTE411.org. Please make your plan to vote!

Thank you for coming and helping us Make Democracy Work!

Tips for a successful event

- Start and end the event on time.
- End each round on time, and quickly start the next round so participants do not lose interest.
- Ensure the timer is high volume so that all in the room can hear when each segment has ended. If the discussion is in a large room, the timekeeper should have a microphone to give a one-minute warning.
- As attendees enter, ask them to sit at the round tables as evenly distributed as possible.
- Determine in advance how to handle media, depending on whether you expect only one or multiple media personnel to attend. They can either be seated at a separate table or asked to roam to have access but should not be seated at the roundtable as a voter. The event needs to be voter focused rather than media focused.
- Schedule a break midway if the forum lasts longer than one hour.
- After the forum, provide time and space for candidates and attendees to visit.
- Provide refreshments.

III. Following the Event

1. Direct Outreach
 - Thank candidates and volunteers.
 - Follow-up with names on sign-in sheet; consider sending a feedback survey to attendees.
 - Evaluate what went well and what needs improvement; make notes for future events.
 - Restock membership materials.
2. Partner Organization Outreach
 - Follow-up with the partner organization to strengthen mutual relationships.
 - Evaluate working with this organization for future events.
 - Invite key members to join LWV.
3. Media Outreach
 - Send out a follow-up press release or letter to the editor.
 - Thank members of the media that attended.
 - Invite the media to the next event.

Appendix

Sample Participation Rules & Agreement for Candidates: Information to Include

Use LWV logo and/or local League letterhead!

Logistics and Format

- Contact information for event coordinator
- Name of event
- Date and time of event
- Location of event
- Agenda and time allocations, e.g.:
 - Introduction, opening statements 10:00 – 10:20
 - Roundtable discussions 10:20 – 12:00
 - Candidate closing remarks, adjourn 12:00 – 12:30
 - Meet-and-Greet 12:30 – 01:00
- Nonpartisan statement.

Information about Invited Candidates

- All candidates, including unopposed candidates, who appear on the ballot for the following races are invited: [list the offices].
- Candidates in contested races may participate even if their opponents fail to appear because they are not answering the same questions at the same time.
- Only candidates may participate. No substitute for a candidate may participate in the roundtable discussion, read a statement, or distribute candidate literature.

Request for Response

Please reply to this invitation by [date & time] so that the event can be publicized. Information provided to the public about the event will list candidates invited and whether they will attend, not attend, or if no response was received.

- If you plan to attend, please complete the Participation Agreement at the end of this document and email it to [name@email address].
- If you do not plan to attend, please email your reply to [name@email address].

Description of Candidate Roundtable Discussion Forum

Opening statement: Prior to the roundtable discussions, individual candidates introduce themselves.

Candidates then go to their first assigned table with the assistance of volunteers.

Discussion: A series of 15-25-minute dialogues between one candidate and a small group of voters seated at a round table with a nonpartisan moderator (if using). At the end of each segment, voters will move to another table; candidates

remain at their table. This continues until everyone has a chance to speak with every candidate at least once. Questions will be asked by citizens at each table.

Closing statement: Following the roundtable discussions, individual candidates make closing statements in a timed 2-minute segment.

Participation Rules

1. Candidates should arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the beginning of the event.
2. Candidate literature should be placed on the designated table. It may not be placed on seats or handed to attendees as they enter or leave the room. Only small items such as cards, brochures, and flyers are permitted, not yard signs or banners. No campaign signs, banners, literature, handouts, or other campaign paraphernalia is allowed in the parking lot.
3. Candidates may not use prepared notes or other props in their statements or roundtable discussions. (A notepad and pen will be provided to each candidate for note taking, along with a nametag and bottle of water.)
4. Each candidate will have one minute for an opening statement and up to two minutes for a closing statement.
5. All questions will come from attendees during the roundtable discussions. Candidates may not address questions to other candidates.
6. The audience will be asked to refrain from applause or other demonstrations of support or opposition for a candidate, including wearing campaign apparel.
7. All candidates are invited to participate in a Meet-and-Greet following the forum to visit informally with attendees.
8. All news releases about this event will be distributed by the League of Women Voters and co-sponsors and sent to all candidates.
9. Any audio-video recording and photography of the roundtable discussion event is limited to and becomes the property of the League of Women Voters. Members of the news media may take notes for news stories about the event.

Participation Agreement

I agree to participate in the candidate roundtable discussion forum to be held [date] and accept the format and rules as presented above. The forum content is the property of the League of Women Voters and permission must be sought to rebroadcast the event in its entirety or to print excerpts. I agree that I will not use any portion of the forum in a political advertisement.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

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Sample Checklist for Materials/Events/Supplies

Printed Materials	#
League and voting information handout	1 per attendee
Rules of decorum handout (can be integrated into program)	1 per attendee
Program with a schedule of activities, qualifications for each office represented and names of corresponding candidates, ground rules for discussion, and space for notes. Alternatively, a "place mat" for each seat, with the League's logo, offices and candidate names listed, and space for notes.	1 per attendee
Name tags, pre-printed	1 per candidate & volunteer
Name tags and/or name tents (blank)	1 per attendee
Name tents - pre-printed	1 per candidate
Sign-in sheets for attendees	5
Sign-in sheet for candidates	1
League membership applications	20
Release forms for attendees	If using photography
Signs for restrooms and tables with campaign literature. Table numbers.	As needed
Supplies	#
Markers for name tags and/or name tents	5 at registration table for name tags and/or 1 per table for tents
Pens for sign-in sheets	5
Mini pencils (3.5" pre sharpened)	Attendees
LWV banner for podium	1

Notepads and pens for candidates	As needed
Bottled water for candidates	1 per candidate
Light refreshments (optional)	Attendees
Paper plates, cups & napkins (optional)	Attendees
Equipment	#
Tables - 4' X 6'	3-4 for registration, display and for candidates to wait prior to roundtable
Chairs	2-3 for registration and as needed for candidates
Round tables with chairs	1 table per candidate with 6-10 chairs each, spaced as far apart as possible. Display numbers on tables prominently. Mark one chair as "Reserved for Candidate" with a balloon
Podium for leaders participating in introduction	1
Microphone at podium (if needed based on the size of the room)	1
Timers for Timekeeper and paddles with minute countdown and times up	1

Note: Please see Appendix of *LWV-VA Toolkit for Candidate Forums* for other sample documents, including candidate invitations, press release template, and an attendance tracker.