



Toolkit for Candidate Forums

January 2024

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Acknowledgments

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

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Overview

This toolkit is intended to assist local Leagues and their boards in planning and executing candidate forum events. Local Leagues may choose to offer or collaborate in offering candidate events whenever there is a contested election at its level of government.

Candidate events may be held by local Leagues for the following elections:

- General Assembly, county, city, town, or village primary, general, or special elections.
- School board elections.

Candidate events at other levels of government are governed by the following guidelines:

- LWVUS is responsible for candidate events for national office.
- LWVVA is responsible for candidate events for statewide offices.

All candidate forums and events must comply with the League's nonpartisan policy.

Additional Resources

LWVUS: [FAQ's: League Candidate Forums and Debates](#)

LWVUS: [Guidelines for State and Local League Debates Including "Empty Chair" Debates](#)

LWVUS: [Hosting Virtual and Hybrid Candidate Debates & Forums](#)

I. Plan the Forum

Role of the local League board

To Establish Policies Regarding Conduct of Candidate events:

Candidate events are the responsibility of the entire local League board. The entire board is responsible for the success of the candidate event and should be active in the planning and oversight of the event. It is crucial that the League maintains control of the event from the inception.

Set and communicate the date

Choose a date after the filing deadline and before the start of early voting. These dates can be found on the State Board of Elections website, <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/casting-a-ballot/calendars-schedules/>. The forum may be recorded and presented on YouTube and social media as well as embedded on your website. Once you have scheduled your forum, be sure to send the details to the LWVUS VOTE411.org coordinator so that it can be posted on VOTE411! Also send it to the

Virginia Voter Services Director (Janet Boyd, as of the date of this publication, VoterServices@lww-va.org).

Choose forum platform

Determine whether your forum will be held in person, virtually, or as a hybrid event.

- In-person: An in-person forum must be open and accessible to the public, so choose a place that will not appear to exclude some potential audience. Check the resources regarding [League Events with a DEI Lens](#) to evaluate locations. Keep in mind the expected attendance, need for microphones or media equipment, and an appropriate staging area for the candidates and moderator. You may wish to contact [RevUp Virginia](#) to be a co-sponsor and ask them about accessible options (RevupVirginia@gmail.com). Check policies for food or beverages if you plan to have them available. Be sure that insurance coverage is sufficient, whether that of the League, the co-sponsor, or the facility. Contact LWV Virginia (info@lww-va.org) if you require a co-sponsor.
- Virtual: Shifting to a virtual platform can be more inclusive and allow for greater attendance and participation. LWV-VA has access to the Zoom webinar which provides better security. Keep in mind that it does not allow for breakout rooms or for guests to see each other. It would not work for virtual “candi-dating.” Consider closed captioning and/or translation options.
- Hybrid event: While hybrid events have the advantage of having some or all of the panelists and moderators in the same room, they can result in added costs and technical challenges to the event. Be sure to have a professional who can manage the technology.
- Other: Some Leagues have forums that are not held before a live audience, such as those recorded in a studio where only League members and the candidates are present. In this case, questions are typically gathered from the community prior to the event using social media. Be sure that these are shared on social media, etc. It is best to have a public forum.

Consider partnering with a co-sponsor

It is important that the League maintain its nonpartisan position when co-sponsoring a candidate event. The first step in agreeing to co-sponsorship is to review the other organization’s mission statement to ensure that its goals are consistent with those of the League.

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 moderator 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.

In order to protect our nonpartisanship, political parties and political organizations should not be asked to co-sponsor because they have a personal stake in their candidates. It would be allowable to collaborate with them in nonpartisan elections, such as city council or school board, but even then, the League needs to avoid being linked with any one party. Any group whose leadership has made public statements for or against any candidate, which is known to support a candidate informally, or that advocates for an issue which is on the ballot, should not be asked to co-sponsor.

Resources

- [Guidance For Leagues Partnerships](#)
- [DEI and Partnerships](#)
- Sample documents (see Appendix G)

Fund your forum

Candidate forums, or public educational forums on public policy issues or ballot issues, are educational and do not advocate for a certain candidate or issue. Money from a League's general fund may be used, as well as donations from co-sponsoring organizations. **Do not solicit or take donations from candidates or political parties. Do not sell ads for candidates or issues in any handouts or newsletters.**

Determine which races to include

As noted in the Overview, local Leagues may choose to offer or collaborate in offering candidate events whenever there is a contested election at its level of government.

Candidate events may be held by local Leagues for the following elections:

- General Assembly, county, city, town, or village primary, general, or special elections
- School board elections.

Be mindful if you hold a primary forum that is for one party, you should offer it for the other party if they are having one. Be sure to invite independent candidates to one of them so that all candidates are included.

Consider the format and timing

Do you want to have opening/closing statements and Q&A, or an informal “meet-and-greet” or “candi-dating” where candidates can meet voters individually, talk to them, and hand out campaign information? It may be possible to combine a structured forum with an informal “meet-and-greet” or reception before or after.

For a structured forum, plan on an introductory statement (two to five minutes) and a closing statement (one to two minutes) from each candidate and add that to the time for questions for each office. The forum should not exceed two hours.

Note: It will be important to determine in advance how to handle situations in which the candidate goes over time in their statement or in answering a question.

Decide how to ask questions

Do you want to have questions from the audience, from a panel and/or from a moderator? If you use a panel or moderator, they must have no previous relationship with any of the candidates. If you want questions from the audience, do you want to use written or oral questions? The pros and cons of each method are presented below, but on the whole, written questions provide much more control and allow a broader range of questions, but oral questions allow for livelier discussions. Consider the audience when choosing the method or perhaps a combination of methods.

It is not recommended that questions be shared with candidates prior to the event for the following reasons:

- Responses may be written by someone else. It is informative to evaluate a candidate’s ability to respond spontaneously, and to give organized and appropriate responses as would be required if elected to office.
- Candidates need a good working knowledge of the issues and duties of the office that

they are seeking. Having the questions in advance may not provide an indication of such knowledge.

You may consider asking the candidates to avoid using their cell phones and any written material when they take part in a forum so they cannot research questions being asked while another candidate is answering. You may provide note paper with pen/pencil for candidates to make notes during the forum.

Oral questions

Oral questions allow for more active audience participation but have several drawbacks: The questioner may take more time than appropriate to pose a question or attempt to make a speech, may personally attack a candidate, or may ask a question that does not pertain to the office. Often a certain question triggers associated questions in the audience's mind, limiting time to explore other areas of interest. Sometimes one questioner may dominate as others in the audience defer to them. It can sometimes be hard to hear the questioner, or to understand their point.

If you decide to use oral questions, consider the following suggestions:

- Specify a time limit for the question (e.g., 30 seconds).
- Specify that all audience members will be allowed to ask a question before anyone is called on to pose a second question.
- Have questioners use a microphone so everyone can hear them.
- Be sure the audience knows the "rules" for questions, including that the question be addressed to an office, not an individual, and that personal attacks/commentary are not allowed. Be prepared to disqualify a question if it is inappropriate.
- Be sure that the questions are directed to the specific office and that each candidate has a chance to participate equitably.

Written questions

Written questions have several advantages: The audience has time to think of good questions, and to craft them in writing. A range of interests is often reflected in the questions.

With written questions, question screeners can be used to:

- Eliminate or rephrase questions that are inappropriate or poorly written.
- Reword questions addressed to an individual candidate so they apply to all candidates.
- Group questions that are similar or are about the same subject, leaving more time for other issues.
- Write reserve questions to be used if the audience does not submit enough questions to fill the time allotted.
- Prioritize questions so that the more important ones are first.

Televising or recording the forum

The goal is to reach as many potential voters as possible, so forums and access to recordings of them should be heavily promoted. Leagues often partner with local media to obtain the broadest possible coverage.

- Check with your local television station(s) to determine if they would like to broadcast the forum live or record it for delayed broadcast. Many cities film candidate forums for broadcast on community access cable channels. The media department of a local college may be able to provide technical assistance.
- Newspapers need content for their website and might podcast or webcast a forum as well as advertise it in the newspaper.

Virtual forums facilitate the League recording the forum themselves to post on their website and social media and to share with local media. **Please note:** the recording of candidate events and use of the recordings are regulated by both LWV policy and the Federal Communications Commission. For in-person, virtual, or hybrid events, LWVUS recommends that debate or forum moderators issue a verbal statement at the beginning of the event to this effect: "Recordings of this event, whether they be in-person or on a digital device, may not be used without the express written approval of the League. The League will only allow audio/video of this event to be broadcast in its entirety, except by the media reporting on the event." This statement should also be written in the description of the virtual event.

No part of a candidate's remarks should be edited, and candidates are not allowed to use any part of the forum for campaign purposes (which should be addressed in the event rules document candidates sign). If the recording needs to be shortened for broadcast, League members should work with the film editor to make sure only non-essential portions are edited out. A broadcast can be cut into segments, as long as all segments are available. The League wants to ensure that information is not manipulated to create false or misleading impressions.

Additional resources for the recording of campaign events /use of recordings:

LWVUS: [FAQ's: League Candidate Forums and Debates](#)

LWVUS: [Guidelines for State and Local League Debates Including "Empty Chair" Debates](#)

LWV of Larchmont/Mamaroneck: Sample [Policy on Recording of Candidates' Debate Forums](#)

LWVCT: [Debates and Forums: Recording and Airing](#)

II. Prepare for the Forum

Obtain candidate information

During or after the filing deadline, obtain the names and contact information of all candidates from the public official in charge of filing for the election. If you contact the candidates during the filing period, you can ask them to "save the date" and to let you

know of any major conflicts for the date. Then, after the filing deadline, do a final check to make sure you have a complete candidate list.

The list can be found <https://www.elections.virginia.gov/casting-a-ballot/candidate-list/>

Guidelines for candidate participation

All candidates on the ballot in any race must be invited to an event for that race.

If the date for certification of the ballot has not yet arrived or if a legal challenge of one or more candidates has delayed certification, the League shall exercise its good faith judgment about which candidates to invite and may invite any candidate whom it believes has a reasonable possibility of obtaining ballot access. In the invitation, it should be noted that only those candidates certified to be on the ballot will be permitted to participate in the candidate event. By the time of the event, only those candidates on the ballot can participate in the event.

Multiple seats with multiple candidates

These types of events may present unique challenges. It is always preferable that you have candidates from at least two different parties for any race, even if there are multiple seats being contested in the same race. It is possible, however, to hold a candidate event with only one party's participation if there are multiple candidates for that one race BUT the League should consider the appearance of doing this prior to making this decision.

Candidate event essentials for in-person and virtual candidate events

EVERY CANDIDATE EVENT, NO MATTER WHAT IT IS NAMED, MUST ABIDE BY THE POLICIES BELOW:

1. Develop a comprehensive written Candidate Event Policy reviewed annually by the Board that includes:
 - Nonpartisan statement
 - Prohibition against empty chair debates
 - Recording policy
 - Criteria for Candidate inclusion (e.g., only including candidates on ballot)
 - Policy on distribution of campaign literature.
2. Send Candidate Event Policy to candidates with the invitation to the event.
 - Obtain acknowledgement of receipt of policy signed by candidate and campaign manager.
3. If sponsoring a primary candidate event, you **MUST OFFER** to sponsor a candidate event for any other party holding a primary for same race.

4. Determine if the candidate event will be held in person, virtually, or both. The policies governing candidate events apply to all formats and platforms.
5. Careful planning of events by the local League requires attention to site, moderator, date, venue, and adherence to the nonpartisan and Empty Chair Policy.
6. Publicity must include a Nonpartisan Statement and the Empty Chair Policy.
7. Display signage with Nonpartisan Statement the evening of event or as first slide in virtual event.
8. If an event is cancelled because of an Empty Chair reason (only one candidate for a race attends), publicize this fact.

If you have any questions, please contact the state League.

IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE LEAGUE IS NOT ONLY NONPARTISAN BUT IS PERCEIVED THAT WAY.

[Invite the candidates](#)

Send a written invitation, signed by the president of the League, which includes information about the forum, the criteria for participation, debate/forum format and rules, a form affirming each candidate's acceptance of the format and rules, and a [release form](#) for League distribution of debate content, including video recordings. (See sample documents in Appendices A-D.) It should be sent to candidates in a traceable form (email with a read receipt requested or USPS with a signed mail receipt).

The invitation should state that only qualified candidates will be allowed to participate, and no substitutes or stand-ins will be allowed to speak for a candidate.

If not all candidates for an office can attend the forum, be sure that you comply with League policies on "empty-chair" debates, as detailed in the LWVUS [guidelines](#) or consider shifting the event to a meet and greet or candi-dating format.

In general:

- If a candidate is unopposed, a debate or forum is not recommended.
- If a candidate is late for a debate or forum, it is recommended that the debate or forum be delayed until all candidates arrive.
- If a candidate cancels and only one candidate is present, the debate/forum should not proceed but can be rescheduled.

- If there are only two candidates and one candidate does not accept the invitation to the debate/forum, the event should not be held. The League is encouraged to reach out to media and coalition partners to encourage the candidate who declined to accept so that the event can proceed.
- It is advised that policies and procedures regarding these situations be agreed to in advance by the League's leadership team and be included in the Forum Guidelines and Participation Agreement.

In any situation, it is critical that the event does not damage the League's nonpartisan reputation by creating the impression that the League favors any candidate or party.

Send other invitations

Invite media members to cover the event. As a courtesy, if the event covers multiple races, candidates in uncontested races may be invited to attend (but not to speak). Current elected officials (who are not also candidates) may also be invited, as well as county, city, or school administrators.

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.

Community considerations

In planning any candidate event, the community in which the event will be held must be taken into consideration. The League must consider how to educate the public and meet the needs of their community. This may include an event in a language other than English or accessibility for individuals with disabilities at an in-person event. These considerations, especially meeting the needs of people with disabilities, may be easier in a virtual event where features such as closed captioning may be available. The League should network with organizations in that community to ensure the event will meet the needs of that community.

Appoint forum officials

The Forum Coordinator should be sure the following positions are assigned:

- Moderator – The moderator of a candidate event manages the discussion and must remain in control of the event. Unless a member of the local League sponsoring the event moderates, the moderator should NOT be a constituent of the candidates in the race of the event (easy to accomplish for a virtual event). The moderator can be a local or neighboring League member or an impartial, objective individual chosen by the League. The moderator should be thoroughly familiar with LWV policies and principles, especially nonpartisanship. The

moderator's political views and positions should be generally unknown in order to avoid any appearance of bias or partisanship. The moderator should not be identified as a member of a political party or a friend of any of the candidates.

- Timekeeper – The timekeeper should keep accurate time with a stopwatch or other timer and signal time remaining to the speaker. The Moderator and Timekeeper should establish who will intervene if a candidate runs over time and how.
- Question Screener – If written questions from the audience are used (in person) or if participants are able to submit questions via the Q&A function (virtual), one or more persons should be appointed to screen the questions before giving them to the moderator or posing them to the candidates. The screener should have a working knowledge of the issues pertaining to the election.
- Technical Coordinator – For virtual meetings, assign someone to recite the technical rules and guidelines, and to be on hand to monitor and rapidly address/resolve technical issues.
- Question Collectors/Ushers – For in-person events, these volunteers direct people to seats, distribute question forms, and collect them from the audience during the forum.
- Security Designee and/or Monitor – While this person may not need to be introduced, you might find it helpful to have someone on the alert in case an attendee becomes disruptive or does not otherwise follow the event rules. This monitor could also ensure the candidates adhere to any agreement regarding not using support materials or other props. You may also have ushers play this role.

You can have the pledge of allegiance said before the event. Some Leagues ask a local Girl Scout troop to “present the colors.”

[Prepare promotional and/or printed material](#)

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.

For in-person forums:

- Print programs for the audience, with information about the candidates and offices, the forum format, election dates, dates and media channels of recordings, and the League's contact information and nonpartisan policy.

- Print a [nameplate](#) to place in front of each candidate, showing the candidate's name and office sought.
- Have *Voters Guides* (if applicable), VOTE411.org promotional material, membership forms, and other League publications available during the forum but avoid any publications that advocate for a certain position.

For virtual events:

- Post voting information and VOTE411.org links in the chat function.
- Include a slide at the beginning and end of the forum reminding participants about voting dates and provide the League's contact information and nonpartisan policy.

Visit the site

In-person Events – Before the event, the Forum Coordinator will need to visit the site to determine the staging. Confirm the availability of a podium or lectern for the moderator, and tables, chairs, and microphones for the candidates. Determine the arrangement of the candidates, and the placement of the Moderator(s) and the Question Screeners. Consider whether the audio is sufficient; several microphones are preferable to just one. Determine whether the seats for the audience will have to be arranged just prior to the event. If the forum is recorded, consider where the camera will be placed. Make sure the backdrop is pleasing and appropriate. Check the location of light switches and heater/air conditioner thermostat or fans. Arrange for a table outside the meeting room for the candidates' campaign literature, as well as League literature. Check the availability of restrooms and fire exits, as well as disability access.

Virtual and Hybrid Forums – Before the event, the Technical Coordinator should guide several run-throughs of the event, testing audio and visual access for all participants, including at least one practice with the candidates.

III. [Manage the Forum](#)

Set up the room

For an in-person event, on the day of the forum, the Forum Coordinator and other volunteers should arrive early to complete the final set up, to place water and nameplates at the candidates' places, and to set up a sign-in table for all attendees. Designate a person to greet the candidates as they arrive, check them off a list, and answer any questions about the format. Have question forms for the audience, and ushers to pass them out and take them to the Screener or Moderator. During the event, observe carefully to make sure everything is running smoothly.

Regardless of format (in-person, virtual, or hybrid), for League record keeping purposes, establish a process to tally the number of attendees, including candidates and their staff, news media, general public, and League members.

Conduct the forum

The League President, Forum Coordinator, or Moderator should welcome the audience and candidates and explain the purpose of the event and the League's nonpartisan policy. A statement of the importance of voting and participating in government may be included.

The Technical Coordinator should give an overview of the functions of the virtual platform.

The Moderator should explain the format, including time limits and how questions and answers will be managed. They should introduce the Timekeeper and explain how time limits will be signaled to the candidates. It is important to remind both the candidates and the audience that no personal attacks will be allowed.

The Timekeeper should sit in the front row (or be visible on screen) to be easily seen by the candidates and Moderator and should have a stopwatch and some device or sign for signaling the candidates as to their time limits. Signs to indicate time left are better than bells or gavels, which are more disruptive.

The Moderator should introduce each group of candidates and explain the duties of the office, salaries, and term, if this information is not available in printed form. They should be familiar with the candidates' names, party affiliations, and the order in which they will be seated. Many Leagues have the candidates speak in the order that they appear on the official ballot. It is good to reverse the order for closing remarks.

After candidates' opening statements, candidates respond to questions from the audience or panel. Candidates' responses should be timed and can usually be limited to one minute. Questions should be directed to all candidates, not to an individual.

At the end of the question period, allow each candidate to make a closing statement of a pre-set length, so they may correct any misimpression and/or thank the audience.

The League President or Moderator should make any closing announcements. Thank the candidates and the audience for their attendance and participation, remind them of *Voters Guide* availability/ publication date (if applicable), early voting dates, and media channels where the recording of the event can be found. Also, direct participants to VOTE411.org. A sample moderator script can be found in the Appendix F.

Head off problems and disruptions

The Moderator should be aware of any challenges or potentially disruptive or controversial issues that might cause difficulty. They must maintain proper decorum, and should not become nervous, angry, rude, or overly casual. Humor often diffuses a tense situation.

Consider the following tips to help address any unplanned activities or disruptions:

- Distribute or email an agenda and/or format rules to all participants.
- Have the Moderator meet with the candidates before the forum starts to re-affirm their understanding and agreement to the rules and format.
- Consider having police or security people present at the event.
- Have a number of League members sprinkled throughout the audience to help maintain order.
- Moderators should be prepared to keep their composure and maintain a strong, yet civil tone that exemplifies the respectful discourse expected of Leagues.
- Include a statement such as the following in the Moderator's opening remarks: "In order to ensure that you have the most time to hear from the candidates running to represent you, we have established the format, time, and terms for this forum together. All candidates have agreed in advance to the following rules." Then read the agenda and rules or format.
- If there's pushback from the audience – consider a couple of quick options:
 - "If we hear no objection from the candidates and those assembled, we'll take a minute to do that before we start." (or)
 - "We are happy to entertain that at the end as time allows."

Determine if there are any candidate activities planned before or after the forum that would require more crowd management or additional security personnel.

IV. Post-Event Follow-up and Evaluation

With the Board and forum officials, conduct an evaluation of what parts of the forum worked and what didn't work, and document any changes for the future. Send thank-you notes to the candidates for appearing and for running for office. After the election, you may want to send congratulations to the winners, as well as encouragement to the candidates who did not win, thanking them for their participation in the political process.

See Appendix I for an evaluation form. These are good to have for future planners and also can help when applying for grants.

V. Moderating a Non-LWV Forum

Many organizations ask the League to moderate their candidate forums. In such cases, the League must still ensure that the forum meets League standards for nonpartisanship and fairness to candidates, including the following:

- All candidates for the office are invited.
- All candidates are given equal time and opportunity to make opening and closing remarks and answer questions from the audience.
- Questions, whether written or oral, are based on issues, do not include

personal attacks, and are presented to all candidates for an office for response.

- The forum conforms to League policies such as videotaping and placement of candidate materials.

The sponsoring organization should meet the same guidelines as a co-sponsor for a League forum: they must be approved by the League Board of Directors and cannot have endorsed or been affiliated with a candidate, party, or ballot issue.

The event cannot be publicized as a League forum. However, the sponsoring organization, not the League, may take the lead in setting the date, arranging a venue, funding the event, providing volunteers, and publicizing the event. They may also invite the candidates, as long as the League nonpartisanship standards are maintained. The sponsoring organization and the League should agree on the format of the forum.

The League should provide the Moderator, Timekeeper, and Question Screener, if possible. Additional volunteers may come from the sponsoring organization.

If the forum is to be broadcast or recorded, League policies on broadcasts must be maintained. Any use of forum recordings requires the express written approval of the League; the FCC and the League will only allow audio/video to be broadcast in its entirety, except by the media reporting on the event.

VI. Appendices

A. Sample initial invitation to candidates (use logo/local League letterhead)

The League of Women Voters of _____ (add any co-sponsor) is/are planning a "Meet the Candidates Night," for [race] in the [name/type] election to be held at the [location] on either [dates]. We are inviting you to participate in our event.

Only candidates whose names are on the _____ County/City Board of Elections ballot may participate in the event. This will include the candidates of major and minor parties in the district. We are aware that the ballot has not yet been certified, but we are sending this information to potential candidates so that you can enter our event in your calendar.

We will circulate candidate event rules to all candidates prior to the event, including our "empty chair" policy that states at least two candidates for each race must appear for the event to be held. Prior to the event, we will ask that you sign and return a copy of the rules to confirm your agreement.

The League of Women Voters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan political organization whose primary purpose is to promote the informed and active participation of citizens in their government. League-sponsored candidate events serve to: educate the public, motivate voters to participate in the elections, and give voters a chance to hear the views of the candidates.

The League never supports or opposes candidates or political parties.

We look forward to your participation in this event. Sharing your views with the electorate enables voters to make educated choices on their ballots.

Please confirm your availability for one or both of the possible event dates. Please respond to me as soon as possible by phone or email. The League of Women Voters of _____ (and the co-sponsor _____) look forward to hosting this event and widely publicizing it to voters, and all other interested residents.

Sincerely yours,

[name and signature of League President]

[name and contact information of Voter Services Director or Forum Coordinator]

B. Sample confirmation to candidates (use logo and/or local League letterhead)

To Candidates for [Name of office and place]: [names of candidates and party, if appropriate]

Dear _____:

The League of Women Voters of _____ invites you to participate in a public candidate forum to provide information to voters for the coming [date and type] election. The purpose of the forum is to educate the public about issues, allow face-to-face comparisons of the candidates and their positions, and stimulate and increase voter interest and participation in the election.

The candidate forum will be [date and time] at [location and address].

[If you will have multiple sessions, state the time of each session and which candidates will appear.]

Details about the forum and its format are in the attached Forum Guidelines and Participation Agreement.

I would appreciate your response regarding participation in the candidate forum no later than [deadline for response]. You may contact our Forum Coordinator by email or telephone, using the contact information below. As we receive responses, we will update the list of participating candidates on our website [URL for website].

Thank you for your participation.

[name and signature of League President]

[name and contact information of Voters Service Director or Forum Coordinator]

C. Sample forum guidelines and participation agreement (use logo and/or local League letterhead)

[Contact information for forum coordinator]

Guidelines for Candidate
Forum

[Name of forum and office]

[Date and time of forum]

[Location of forum]

[Description of format, such as the following:]

1. **Please confirm your participation by [date and time]**, so that we can finalize arrangements and promote the forum via social media and other distribution channels. We will list the candidates invited and indicate whether they are attending, not attending, or have not responded.
 - a. If you plan to attend, complete the Participation Agreement below and email the document to [name and email].
 - b. If you do not plan to attend, please email your reply to [name and email].
2. **Candidates invited to participate in the forum:**
 - a. All candidates who will appear on the ballot for the above contested race(s) are invited.
 - b. Only candidates will be allowed to participate, and no substitutes may stand in for candidates at the forum, either to read a statement or to distribute candidate literature.
 - c. *If the forum is subject to rules prohibiting participation by a single candidate for an office, include a statement like the following:*

LWV policies require that at least two candidates in each race must participate in this forum; otherwise, a single candidate in a race can only be introduced at a forum but not speak or answer questions. Candidates will be notified if they are the only candidate in the race who has agreed to participate.
3. **Unopposed candidates invited to be introduced:**

Unopposed candidates may not be speakers at the forum; however, they may be introduced during the forum and are invited to the Meet-and-Greet.
4. **Guidelines and Format:**
 - a. Candidates should arrive at least 10 minutes prior to their respective session.
 - b. Candidate literature may be placed on tables provided outside the auditorium. It may not be placed on seats or handed out to attendees as they enter or leave the room for the forum. Only small items are permitted, such as cards, brochures, and flyers, but not large signs or banners.
 - c. All candidates will be seated by office sought, in an order determined by a

- random draw [or other method]. Speaking order will be rotated.
 - d. Each candidate will have up to three minutes for opening remarks, in the order seated.
 - e. Written questions from the audience will be read by the Moderator and each candidate for the office addressed will have up to one minute to respond. The speaking order of candidates will rotate.
 - f. Each candidate will have up to two minutes for closing remarks, in the reverse order of opening remarks.
 - g. Candidates may not address questions or remarks to other candidates; all questions will come from the audience.
 - h. All candidates are invited to attend the Meet-and-Greet to talk individually to attendees and distribute campaign materials.
5. **QUESTIONS?** Contact [name, email, telephone].

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT: I agree to participate in the Candidate Forum [date] and accept the format and rules as presented above. The forum content is the property of the League of Women Voters of _____ and permission must be sought to rebroadcast the forum; the forum can only be broadcast in its entirety. I agree that I will not use any portion of the forum in a political advertisement.

Candidate's name _____
Candidate's signature _____ Date _____

D. Sample confirmation letter to candidates for virtual event (use logo and/or local League letterhead)

Dear Candidates:

Once more, thank you for your willingness to serve your community. Citizens like you keep our democracy strong. The League of Women Voters of _____ is delighted that you have agreed to participate in our candidates' forum, which will be held on [day/date]:

- Senate candidates' forum begins at 7:00 p.m. — please join us on Zoom by 6:30 p.m. — "Go Dark" (described below) begins about 6:50 p.m.
- Assembly candidates' forum begins at 8:30 p.m. — please join us on Zoom by 8:10 p.m. — "Go Dark" begins about 8:25 p.m.

We will admit all candidates for the same office from the waiting room at the same time. Please be prompt so we can ensure that audio and video are working, review how the forum will run, and answer any questions. We will ask you to mute yourself and turn your camera off for up to 10 minutes prior to start time so that we can set up the live-streaming links and have viewers ready to begin on time. This "Go Dark" phase is critical for us; we need you to be in the Zoom meeting and ready prior to going dark. As you know, the forum will be held virtually, which means you need a computer with a camera and a microphone and a strong internet connection.

If needed: If you are not familiar with Zoom, you may want to practice with family and friends. We will ask you during the forum to turn your camera and mic on and off. (Someone near you could assist you if that would be easier.)

The League will livestream the forum on our LWV website: _____. Questions may be submitted by audience members to the League either before or during the forum through these links: [Link for questions to Senate candidates]; [Link for questions to Assembly candidates]. When you publicize the live-stream forum directing constituents to our URL, you may want to include the link for questions. The Moderator will receive questions electronically via League veters before and during the forum.

Both the candidates and League members running the forum will be participants in the Zoom meeting that will be live-streamed to viewers. We will send you the Zoom link a day or so before the event. Entry into the Zoom meeting (unlike public access to the live-stream for viewers) will be restricted, so please do not share the Zoom link we send you. Attached are the rules and procedures for the meeting.

Please return a signed copy via email. If you have any questions, please feel free to call or write.

Sincerely,

[name]

Voter Service Chairperson

League of Women Voters of _____

Phone: (###) ###-####

Email:

E. Sample press release announcing a candidate event (use logo/local League letterhead)

For Immediate Release Contact: _____ Date _____ (xxx) xxx-xxxx

NEWS RELEASE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF _____ INVITES PUBLIC TO
LWV [candidate event title] [day, date, time and place]

To enable voters to hear the candidates and question them about important issues in the Tuesday, [date] Election, the League of Women Voters of _____ is sponsoring a [debate/forum/event] on [date, time, place.] At least two candidates for each race must be present or that portion of the program will be cancelled.

[Candidate list in alpha order.]

The event format consists of the candidates making timed opening and closing statements and answering questions submitted by a panel of local media and the League, as well as by the audience.

The event is organized by the League of Women Voters of _____. Further information is available from the League at [*phone and e-mail*].

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization, encourages informed and active participation of all citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

F. Sample moderator script

Nonpartisanship policy:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization, encourages informed and active participation of all citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

Format of session:

This session will present the candidates for [specify offices]. [Describe term and responsibilities of each office and introduce the candidates, including any unopposed candidates in the audience.]

If you anticipate any requests from the audience regarding format or procedures, you may say the following: In order to ensure that you have the most time to hear from the candidates running to represent you, we have established the format, time, and terms for this forum together. All candidates have agreed in advance to the following format. [Include any specific parts of the format that may be contested by audience members.]

To begin, each candidate will have up to **3** minutes for opening remarks. After that they will respond to written questions from the audience. Then each candidate will have **2** minutes for closing remarks.

All candidate remarks will be timed, to ensure equal opportunity for everyone. Our timekeeper is [name], a member of our League. Candidates, she will raise signs to let you know how much time is left. Please stop promptly when your time is up.

The program has a form on which members of the audience may submit a question for our Q&A period. As you listen to the candidates, you may write a question on the form and pass it to the aisle for one of the League members/ushers to pick up. Raise your hand if you need another form or a pencil. Please write questions for an office, rather than an individual. Questions will be screened for appropriateness and grouped by topic.

Candidates' opening remarks:

The candidates are seated, left to right, in the order in which they will give opening remarks. [Describe how the order was determined.] Each candidate will have up to **3** minutes, beginning with [name of first candidate].

[Announce the name of each candidate in turn.]

Questions and answers:

We have collected several questions from the audience. Each candidate will have the opportunity to respond to each question. We will vary the speaking order to allow different candidates to speak first, last, etc.

The first question is [_____]. We will give each candidate **1** minute to respond, beginning with [name of candidate].

(Note: It is helpful to provide candidates with a list of the speaking order for each question.)

Candidates' closing remarks:

Each candidate will now have **2** minutes for closing remarks. Candidates, you may want to address any issues that have come up during the questions.

This time we are going to go in reverse order from the opening remarks, beginning with [name of first candidate].

End of session:

This concludes this session of our candidate forum. Thank you to the candidates for your participation and to the audience for your attendance and questions. Please check your program for information about *Voters Guides*, voting dates, and sample ballots. And please visit VOTE411.org.

If multiple sessions: We will have a break during which time you can talk to candidates individually. We will begin the next session promptly at [time].

G. Sample candidate forum memorandum of understanding for partners (use logo and/or local League letterhead)

Candidate Forum Deliverables

1. The League of Women Voters does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. The Forum must adhere to this policy in all respects.
2. In order to perform their obligations in producing and hosting the Candidate Forum, the Parties agree to the following terms, conditions, and deliverables:
 - a. The Partners agree to jointly produce and broadcast a Candidate Forum focusing on candidates for the following contested elected office(s): _____. The Forum will be held on _____.
 - b. The sponsors of the Forum are _____. No other sponsors shall be acknowledged. Only sponsor logos will be permitted in collateral materials. The League of Women Voters of _____ will be recognized as the event's originating sponsor.
 - c. Media sponsors shall arrange for the Forum to be broadcast live on the following media: _____
 - d. Abridged clips of the Forum will be permitted only for news broadcast content. The League will be allowed to share this feed via its social media at no cost. This event will be open to all media.
 - e. Media sponsors, if invited to moderate, shall ensure that the moderator refrains from any partisan conduct or statements in emceeding and moderating the Forum.
 - f. Prior to inviting any Forum candidates, the partners shall establish and use objective non-partisan criteria to determine which candidates officially qualify for election to this office and shall extend invitation to all qualifying candidates for the Forum. This criterion should also address the possibility of write-in candidates for office.
 - g. No individual except qualified candidates for [name office being contested] shall be allowed to participate in this Forum.

H. 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 (LWVUS Name Tent Template)	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
Timer for Timekeeper Paddles for timekeepers with minute countdown and "times up"	1

I. Sample post-event reporting form

NAME OF PERSON REPORTING: _____

LEAGUE TITLE/ROLE: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

VOTER SERVICE GOALS	ACTIONS	RESULTS	
1.			
2.			
3.			
CANDIDATE EVENTS (League sponsored or co-sponsored; in person or virtual)		NUMBER OF EVENTS	
Candidate Forums In-Person			
Candidate Forums Virtual			
Candidate Forums In-Person AND Virtual			
League co-sponsored candidate forums (in-person or virtual)			
Meet-and-Greets			
Other (provide details)			
TOTAL			
VOLUNTEERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN ACTIVITIES (Members and Non-Members)		NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS	NUMBER OF HOURS
Training Workshops/Webinars/Planning Meetings			
Candidate Forums			
Other (provide details)			
TOTAL			

TARGETED COMMUNITIES FOR CANDIDATE EVENTS: communities with low voter registration or turn out rates		YES/NO	
Senior Communities			
Disabled People Communities/Organizations			
Communities of Color/Ethnicities			
Communities with Lower Incomes			
University/4-year College Students			
Community College/Technical/Vocational School Students			
Coalition Organizations/Partners (provide organizations' names)			
Other (provide details)			
SPECIAL FEATURES INCLUDED IN EVENTS		PRINT	DIGITAL
Other languages besides English:			
Features for Disabled People: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Braille and/or Large Font for Printed Materials • Closed Caption for Hearing Impaired • Sign Language Translation for Hearing Impaired • Event Accessibility for Disabled People • Other (provide details) 			
Other (provide details)			
MEDIA COVERAGE OBTAINED BY YOUR LEAGUE FOR CANDIDATE EVENT	DETAILS OF COVERAGE	HOW MANY	
Newspaper Coverage			
Television Coverage			
Radio Coverage			

Social Media Coverage		
Social Media Followers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook • Instagram • Twitter • Other 		
Website		
Engagement with Local Reporters		
Other (provide details)		
OTHER NOTES		

REPORT DATE _____