

LWV-Michigan Suggested Questions to Ask Candidates in Local/State Races

In the following pages are sample questions that have been asked by local Leagues over the years.

- The goal is to ask both some general questions to give the candidates an opportunity to show what's on their minds, as well as some more specific questions that are pertinent to current events.
- What's really important is that the questions are both fair and appropriate to the office, and that all candidates for the same office are asked the same questions.
- Some are redundant, offering choice of wording for the same idea.
- Many questions listed in specific offices can be rephrased to use in other races.

Adapt or update questions to your community and its current issues. These can be used in Voter Guides and/or Candidate Forums.

Generic for All Candidates

1. What is your background, and how will it help you to serve this community as [Mayor, Clerk, etc.]? Why are you running for this office?
2. Describe your qualifications and experience for this office and explain your reasons for running. How would you be an asset?
3. What are the priority issues facing our community, and how would you address them if elected?
4. What are the most important challenges facing our community, and how do you propose to address them?

Mayor or City Council

1. How do you plan to involve residents in the decision-making process in our town?
2. A city council seat is traditionally non-partisan. Some think partisanship has crept into our local races. Is this a fair statement? What would you do to address that?
3. What do you think is the number one infrastructure issue facing our city?
4. If someone came to you with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in our city (road, bridge, etc.), how would you evaluate whether or not that project was worth implementing?
5. If elected, what three steps would you take to put our city on a firmer financial footing?

Mayor or City Council (continued)

6. If you received a \$1 million grant to use for the city any way you wanted, what would you do with it and why?
7. Some people in our community say that we have traffic problems. What do you think? How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation?
8. What's more important for our city right now: building new homes and commercial space or rehabbing/expanding/better utilizing our existing homes and storefronts?
9. Describe your qualifications related to budgets and policies and your engagement in local government. Please be specific about your public service on committees, commissions and/or attendance at Council meetings.
10. What do you see as the top issue facing our city today? How have you engaged with City Hall or local residents to address this issue recently?
11. Why do you want to be Mayor or a City Councilperson?
12. How well is our community meeting the needs of low-income residents, and what more, if anything, needs to be done?
13. Do you have any plans for how our community can further address the drug problems affecting not only our youth but also the opioid addictions among the senior population?
14. How will you work to support a vibrant economy in our area?
15. How will you work to increase job opportunities for your constituents?
16. What steps, if any, should be taken to curb gun violence in our community?
17. What kinds of policies, if any, will you pursue to promote social and racial justice in our community?
18. How will you consider climate change and other environmental issues in economic development?
19. How well is our community meeting the needs of seniors, and what more needs to be done?
20. Our community's employees reflect our community's attitudes. What further measures can we take to ensure that all residents and visitors are treated with equal respect?
21. What are your hopes for the future of our community's recycling program?
22. Our community is proud of our First Responders but there are issues with every community. What do you see as the most pressing issues with the police and fire departments?
23. How will you learn what's on the mind of residents?
24. Divisions: What are your ideas to make every part of our community feel they are fairly and adequately represented?
25. What major issues do you foresee tackling in the next few years? 15.What are your ideas for making our community "greener"?

Mayor or City Council (continued)

26. What are the most important criteria the Community should use in determining tax incentives to attract and keep our businesses growing and coming to our community?
27. What more can the Community do to attract and cultivate small businesses, especially to cut the “Red Tape”?
28. Maintaining and improving our neighborhoods require responsive and efficient community services. What changes, if any, do you think are needed for citizens to be proud of every neighborhood?
29. Rental properties which span all income levels can be an enormous asset. What do you see as some of the key rental issues in our community?
30. How would you help promote a healthy community?
31. What is the role of citizens in the decision-making process?
32. Is transparency an issue in our community’s government? Why or why not?

City or County Clerk

1. How could voter participation be increased?
2. Discuss the implementation of Michigan’s new voting rights.
3. Discuss the recruiting/training of election workers.
4. How would you ensure that adequate resources of all kinds are fairly allocated across all precincts during elections?
5. How would you engage young voters to increase their participation in elections?
6. As Clerk, how will you ensure that the office is providing good customer services? What are some of your ideas to provide an efficient, welcoming and responsive office?
7. What is the role of the community clerk's office in increasing civic participation in elections, especially increasing the number of registered voters and encouraging turnout?
8. First time voters, especially new citizens, can often feel intimidated at the polling place. What can you do to help make these new voters feel more comfortable and more likely to vote again in the future?
9. How would you ensure that election day poll workers in every precinct are fully trained and consistently offer accurate information? For example, when a voter appears without their Photo ID, that they are not turned away.
10. How do you envision using technology to improve services in the Community Clerk office?

County Commissioner

1. Describe your qualifications and experience for this office and explain your reasons for running. How would you be an asset?
2. Many residents don't understand county government. How would you explain the county's primary responsibilities and services?
3. What are the main challenges facing your district within the county? How would you advocate to address those challenges?
4. Commissioners are elected from separate districts, but also are responsible for decisions that affect the entire county. In what ways do priorities of your district's constituents differ with countywide issues? In ways do they overlap? When priorities differ, what's your process for making decisions?
5. Does the county board have a responsibility to develop relationships with other public entities, such as local cities, universities, libraries and schools? In what ways does that currently happen, and do you think there are better ways to develop those relationships?
6. Would you ever consider eliminating a current tax, or decreasing the millage rate for any of the taxes that are currently levied? If so, which taxes do you think could be lowered or eliminated?
7. What will be your strategy for effectively communicating with constituents?
8. How do you think the County Board of Commissioners could best represent the diverse voices of its constituents, including the veterans, seniors, LGBTQ and racial minority citizens?
9. If the county had an unexpected \$10 million budget surplus, how would you allocate those funds?
10. Do you support the efforts of the Regional Transit Authority of Southeast Michigan? Would you support putting another tax proposal on the ballot to fund the RTA?

County Sheriff

1. What measures would you recommend to ensure that the law is enforced in a humane and just manner?
2. What is your background, and how will it help you to serve this community as sheriff?
3. Why are you running for this office?
4. What are the most important challenges facing our community, and how do you propose to address them?
5. What steps, if any, should be taken to curb gun violence in our community?
6. What major issues do you foresee tackling in the next few years?
7. The county website is vital in providing information to the public when requesting or filing legal documents. Do you feel the county website fulfills this public need and provides opportunity for feedback? What suggestion

would you make to improve the website and its ability to provide the information needed for our community?

County Treasurer

1. What is your background, and how will it help you to serve this community as county treasurer?
2. Why are you running for this office?
3. What are the priority issues facing our community and how would you address them if elected?
4. What are the most important challenges factoring our community, and how did you propose to address them?
5. What is the most challenging part of budgeting for you?
6. If you are elected, how would the treasurer office operate differently than it does now?

County Prosecutor

1. What is the Prosecutor's Office budget? Does it support the high level of service you would like to offer?
2. When the situation call s for a jury trial, does Livingston have a strong and diverse jury pool? If not, what is being done to create such a pool?
3. Why do you feel you are the best qualified for this position?
4. There are multiple police jurisdictions in our county. Are there any major differences in how your office works with each of them? What are they?
5. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, mass incarceration is costing our county 81 billion dollars annually, which may be an underestimate. What can the prosecutor and the sheriff do to reduce Livingston's contribution to this rising figure?
6. What new methods or technology would you advocate to prosecute crime more effectively?

School Board

1. Describe your philosophical commitment to public education and government funding to ensure a thriving and inclusive public education for your community.
2. A district is only effective if it serves all constituents. What specific steps would you take to ensure that our students from poverty, students of color and diverse backgrounds, English Language Learners, homeless, as well as students who identify as LGBTQ benefit from equity, access, an inclusive opportunity? How will YOU ensure all students are "welcomed" in your district?

School Board (continued)

3. The exponential increase in gun violence in schools is of grave concern to parents. Specifically, how should “school safety” be enhanced or improved in your school district? Specifically, what district policies, training, and school-wide practices should be in place to address school safety, school climate and bullying.
4. There is great national concern regarding the status of the teaching profession and whether there are adequate numbers of highly qualified teachers to fill current teaching positions. The reasons for the dearth of new hires are many. How will you work with district leadership to ensure vacancies are filled with highly qualified staff, new teachers attracted, and senior staff supported?
5. If you are elected (or re-elected) how should constituents measure your performance at the end of your term? What would you need to do to earn an “A” (excellent) grade? Identify specific benchmarks. If you are currently serving on the school board, how would you grade your present leadership?
6. Although most school districts have protocols in place regarding book censorship and all Michigan schools are required to have parents involved in the school improvement process, some parent groups have recently advocated for banning specific books from library collections and modifying the curriculum about racial history to represent personal dispositions. What is your opinion regarding these actions?
7. Transparency is critical in order to develop trust, improve community engagement and ensure support for public education. Does your district currently post/share district performance data and school improvement plans? Specifically, what are some take-aways from the AER (Annual Education Report)? From 1-10 how would you rate your district’s website?
8. What are the strengths of the district, and what do you see as its biggest challenges?
9. The district just hired a new school superintendent. What should be their top three priorities?
10. How can the board be more accessible to the entire community?
11. An individual school board member has no authority; decisions can only be made by the Board as a whole. What skills or traits will help you contribute to its functioning?
12. School issues have become fiercely divisive. Can the school board do anything to lessen the rifts in the school district?
13. Do you believe charter schools strengthen or weaken public school districts? (and why)
14. What in your background qualifies you to raise questions on budgets and policies presented at board meetings?

Judges

1. Please provide biographical information and experience and explain why you are running for this office.
2. What are the priority issues facing this court, and how would you address them if elected?
3. What is your general judicial philosophy?
4. Do judges have an obligation to improve public understanding of the courts? If so, how should they carry out that obligation?
5. If you observed a party in your courtroom being poorly represented by an unprepared or ineffective lawyer, how would you handle the situation?
6. Are there any specific types of cases in which you would find it necessary to disqualify yourself?
7. What have been the most effective methods for improving court procedures and efficiency? What other methods would you suggest?

District Court Judges

1. What role would your court play in mediating the relationship between law enforcement and the community?
2. What is the role of the District Court regarding property foreclosures and absentee landlords?

District Court Judges (continued)

3. What role can the courts play to ensure and promote equality in the community?
4. Considering the caseload and complexity of issues, does the State adequately fund the Court? Please explain. If additional resources were available, what changes, if any, should be made?
5. What is your position regarding alternative courts to meet our community's needs for drug courts, mental health courts, veterans' courts, etc.?

Circuit Court Judge

1. Please describe your experience with representing parties in Family Division cases in Ingham County.
2. In which situations would you allow children to be called as witnesses in divorce and custody cases?
3. As a family division judge you order child support. What criteria would you use for that decision

Circuit Court Judge (continued)

4. What do you believe to be the root causes for the high numbers of juvenile offenders? What changes can the court system make to reduce these numbers?
5. How would you make your courtroom more accessible to self-represented litigants?
6. How would you address addiction issues being dealt with by the court?
7. Do you think there are racial biases in the Michigan Judicial system? If so, what can you do to address them?
8. What injustices have you witnessed in or outside the courtroom and what was your response to those events?
9. Are there any specific types of cases in which you would find it necessary to disqualify yourself?

State House/Senate

1. What makes you qualified for the position of Michigan House/Senate Representative? What do you hope to accomplish during your term?
2. What do you perceive as the biggest challenges in your district that should be addressed by the state legislature? What are the biggest challenges impacting the state, but not necessarily your district? How do you plan to balance those priorities?
3. Reports of gun violence and mass shootings have become frequent and disturbing occurrences. The school shootings brought this home to Michigan in a very tragic way. People want assurance of safety, and talk about more restrictions on gun purchases and storage. Michigan also has a significant number of avid gun owners who support stronger regulations. What are your plans to address this hot topic? What legislation would you support?
4. Michigan is known as “The Great Lakes State” and as such is a steward for protecting these critical waterways. What are your thoughts on safeguarding our water from pollution and toxic chemicals? What legislation would you support?
5. How will you protect Michigan’s schools from the potentially disastrous effects of the national teacher shortage?
6. Please identify the top three concerns residents in your district have expressed to you. Describe the steps you would take to address one of these issues if elected.
7. Currently, the State of Michigan has a \$__ million budget surplus in the current fiscal year. What should be done with the budget surplus?
8. A number of your constituents are tired of partisan and political stalemate. How do you plan to approach and work with members of the other party? What would you do differently to make a difference and try to regain public trust?