



# **Candidate Forum Guide**

**League of Women Voters  
of  
Michigan**

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Candidate Forum Defined and Who Should Conduct Them</b>	<b>4</b>
Candidate Forums for Federal Office	4
<b>Planning a Candidate Forum</b>	<b>5</b>
Empty Chair Forums	6
Forum Types	7
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)	9
Securing Co-Sponsors	9
Inviting Candidates	10
Gathering Candidate Questions	11
<b>Roles and Responsibilities of League Members</b>	<b>11</b>
League Forum Coordinator	11
Moderator	12
Timekeeper	13
Greeters (in-person forum)	13
Question Gatherers (in-person forum)	13
Question Sorters	13
<b>Forum Format</b>	<b>14</b>
Introductions	14
Opening Statements	14
Questions and Answers	14
Closing statements	15
Wrap-up and Announcements	15
<b>Forum Script</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Technical Requirements</b>	<b>16</b>
In-Person Forums	16
Protecting Your Video Recordings From Unauthorized Use	16
Disclaimer Statement for Forum Video Recordings	17
Helpful Hints for Virtual Forums	17
<b>Potential Problems</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Post event</b>	<b>19</b>

## **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit A: Nonpartisan Policy

Exhibit B: Candidate Forum Timeline Tasks

Exhibit C: Helpful Hints for Virtual Meetings

Exhibit D: Sample Meet and Greet Invitation

Exhibit E: Sample Meet Your Candidates Invitation

Exhibit F: Sample Candidate Participation Policy

Exhibit G1: Sample In-Person Forum Invitation

Exhibit G2: Sample Virtual Forum Invitation

Exhibit H: Sample Ground Rules and Consent Form

Exhibit I: Sample Candidate Question Grid

Exhibit J1-J4: Sample Forum Scripts

Exhibit K: Sample Virtual Forum Slides

Exhibit K1: Sample Virtual Forum Protocol

Exhibit L: How to Handle Potential Problems

Exhibit M1-M2: Sample Forum Press Releases

Exhibit N1-N2: Sample Promotional Fliers

## Introduction

In carrying out the mission of encouraging informed and active participation in government, the League of Women Voters continues to be key sponsors of candidate forums. The public holds the League in high regard for our work, so it is important to follow best practices to ensure a fair and well executed forum. This respected tradition also offers state and local Leagues excellent opportunities to be visible with the public and to help strengthen the organization through inviting new members to join and develop new leaders.

This Guide provides information on how to plan a candidate forum, invite candidates, determine the forum format, learn technical requirements and review various policies that impact the forum content and candidate participation.

The local League NonPartisan Policy should encourage awareness of how others are likely to view actions of certain officers when representing the League. Guard against actions that the public may perceive as showing favoritism to a particular candidate or party by the President, Vice-President (if applicable) or Voter Service Chair/Director. These actions can also apply to those members in 'high profile' positions, such as a forum moderator or question sorter. [Exhibit A: Sample Nonpartisan Policy](#)

Examples of actions include:

- Don't sign petitions supporting a candidate or solicit contributions from individuals and don't allow such activities at League meetings or events
- Avoid high visibility actions such as allowing names or photos to be used to promote a candidate or political party in publicity or letters to the editor on a candidate's behalf
- Avoid placing signs in yards or bumper stickers on cars supporting candidates or ballot issues on which the League has not taken a position.

Candidate forums bring value to the League in the following ways:

- Well-run and well-attended forums educate the public
- Forums promote the LWV brand for execution and educational value
- Forums provide the opportunity to distribute League publications and membership information to solicit new members
- Increased viewership suggests considerably greater voter education value and greater reach of the LWV brand

**In all activities related to candidate forums, it is vital to protect the League's nonpartisan stance at all times.**

***The LWVMI is a nonpartisan organization. Although the LWVMI board may take action on governmental measures and policies in the public interest, the League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.***

## Candidate Forum Defined and Who Should Conduct Them

A candidate forum is a public event where candidates are invited to express their positions on issues impacting the community. Candidate forums are a public service and provide the opportunity for voters to hear responses to questions and learn more about each candidate seeking election.

All League of Women Voters Candidate Forums must follow a nonpartisan, unbiased and impartial format. Nonpartisanship applies from planning to conclusion. All events should be free and open to the public and media.

Local Leagues may choose to offer a candidate forum whenever there is a contested election in its community/municipality. Candidate forums at other levels of government are governed by the following guidelines.

1. LWVUS is responsible for candidate forums for the President.
2. LWVMI is responsible for candidate forums for statewide office, including the Supreme Court.
3. Candidate forums may be held by local Leagues for the following elections:
  - a. Federal Congress, with permission from or in partnership with LWVMI\*
  - b. State, county, city, town or village-primary and general elections,
  - c. School board elections
  - d. City Council and Mayoral elections
  - e. Judicial elections

Some Leagues may conduct forums sequentially. This can be done both in-person or virtually. Do not mix levels of government in the same forum unless the event is separated by a break between the two forums. Keep the number of candidates manageable when you decide which races to undertake. Forums with multiple candidates may be scheduled on the same date, but with different start times. If in-person, it is important to sequester the second group of candidates so the questions aren't heard in advance.

\* **Exception:** *Candidate forums for the statewide offices of **Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State**, as well as **U.S. Senate** and **Michigan Supreme Court**, are organized by LWVMI, not local Leagues. Before a local League plans or hosts a candidate forum for the **U.S. House of Representatives**, it must first contact LWVMI and follow all guidelines and requirements for federal election forums.*

## Candidate Forums for Federal Office

The **Federal Election Commission** (FEC) regulates the conduct of corporate, labor and nonprofit organizations, including both 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations, in **federal** elections. FEC regulations define a forum/debate as an event that:

- includes at least two candidates;
- is staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another; and

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- allows the candidates to appear concurrently, face-to-face, with opportunities to respond to questions.

The **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)** regulates radio and television broadcasters and cable casters.

Under its regulations, a broadcaster that permits a candidate for any public office — **federal, state or local** — to use its facilities must provide all other legally qualified candidates for the same office with equal opportunities for use.

A broadcast forum must comply with the following FCC requirements.

- The decision to cover the forum must be based on a good faith judgment of its newsworthiness (and not on a desire to promote or disadvantage a particular candidate).
- The forum must not be edited and must be broadcast in its entirety, either live or reasonably soon after it takes place.
- The forum must include at least two candidates for the same office.

**Internal Revenue Service (IRS)** rules provide that 501(c)(3) organizations "may not participate or intervene, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office." This prohibition applies to campaigns for public office at all levels — **federal, state and local**. A violation of IRS rules could jeopardize the tax-exempt status of the 501(c)(3) sponsoring organization.

A 501(c)(3) organization may sponsor nonpartisan voter education projects, such as forums, provided certain rules are followed. The guiding principle for such forums is that there be fair and impartial treatment of all candidates, with nothing that promotes or advances one candidate over another.

## Planning a Candidate Forum

The League can choose whether or not to have a forum. Conducting a forum is not mandatory and the decision rests with the local League's Board of Directors.

Take the lead in planning candidate forums. The League is viewed as the "expert" and most organizations welcome this arrangement. Choose a format that will help voters make an informed electoral decision. Be sure to observe legal requirements for candidate forums as outlined in Candidate Forums for Federal Office (pages 4-5). Expenses for candidate forums fall within LWV's Education Fund guidelines for Ed Fund expenses. Be sure to check with local area Leagues to determine if co-presentations are possible due to district overlaps.

Planning the forum should begin a minimum of eight weeks prior to the forum date. [Exhibit B: Candidate Forum Timeline Tasks](#). It is also recommended that forums be held prior to the release of absentee voter ballots, which is 45 days prior to Election Day. This is when there is greater voter interest and will have the highest impact on people casting their ballots. Avoid

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religious observances or National holidays and dates when other community functions are held (i.e. school board meetings, city council meetings, etc.). The [WinCalendar](#) is a helpful tool that will let you know if there are any major holidays on possible forum dates.

## Empty Chair Forums

When one or more candidates for federal office is on the ballot and only one candidate chooses to attend the League's forum, then no candidate for that office will be permitted to appear.

**Empty Chair forums may not be held for Federal candidates** (e.g. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, U.S. Senate.) The Federal Election Commission (FEC) requires that forums include at least two candidates.

An empty chair forum may be held for state, county or local offices only under the following circumstances:

- No commercial media are broadcasting the forum. Under Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations, any broadcaster or cablecaster that permits a candidate for any public office to use its facilities must provide all other legally qualified candidates for the same office with equal time. Public access channels are not required to abide by this regulation.
- No Education Fund money is being used to fund the forum production. The League must be acting as a 501c4 organization, though the League's nonpartisan policy still applies.
- Every effort has been made to arrange a forum that is suitable to the schedules of the candidates. The League should avoid any appearance of partisanship. The League is encouraged to notify the press that invitations have been sent to the candidates. The League should maintain a clear record of communication with candidates, including corresponding in writing with candidates concerning invitations to appear at forums, attempts to accommodate each candidate's schedule, confirmation of scheduled forum appearances, confirmation of the cancellation of a forum appearance, and attempts, if any, to reschedule a canceled appearance.

If a League decides to go ahead with a forum when one of the candidates does not respond or accept an invitation to the forum, or when a candidate accepts but does not appear at the forum, the League moderator should announce that the absent person(s) is a candidate for that office. The moderator should present the factual reasons (if any) given by the candidate who is not present, without any editorial comment. **No substitutes** will be permitted to take the place of a candidate, nor will the moderator read any statements of the absent candidate's view. In conducting any empty chair forum, the League should maintain, to the extent practicable, the already established forum format.

The League must prevent the forum from turning into a candidate appearance that has the look, feel and content of a Michigan rally for the only candidate attending. The moderator and/or other panelists, therefore, should ask nonpartisan questions, the length of the candidate's

response should be limited, and if possible, the moderator or other panelists should act as devil's advocate, asking probing questions and follow-up questions.

## Forum Types

There are several types of forum formats:

- In-person
- Virtual
- Hybrid\*
- Meet and Greet Events
- Meet Your Candidates Recorded Videos

\*Hybrid forums combine in-person and virtual into one event. The logistics can be challenging to coordinate this type of forum, particularly with the equipment required and staffing needed to manage the virtual component. However, the benefit of a hybrid forum is the ability to reach a wider audience.

### In-Person Forum

This forum is conducted in a public place, such as a library, community building, etc. with a live audience.

When selecting a location, consider the following:

- Includes a room that is sufficient to accommodate a large audience
- Has a raised platform without barriers, which separate the audience from the candidates
- Has a background suitable for cameras and for the display of League banner
- Is accessible for people with disabilities
- Has convenient parking
- Has a security presence, if necessary
- Has adequate audio equipment (i.e. microphones, video, etc.)
- Has sufficient tables for candidates, moderator and timekeepers

### Virtual Forum

This forum is conducted virtually

- a. Open: Live with audience (recorded for public to view)
- b. Closed: No audience (recorded for public to view)

### Pros and Cons of Virtual vs. In-Person Forums

#### Pros

- Cheaper-no venue rental or video fees (except Zoom cost)
- Candidates are more readily available and it's easier to agree on a date
- No commuting time or parking issues for candidates
- Doesn't require as many volunteers to assist
- No cost for food, snacks or other amenities

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- If Zoom works, minimal chance of audio or video snafus
- Recording can be easily posted on YouTube

### Cons

- Not as exciting for members and candidates-audience misses out on candidates' body language and reactions
- Press coverage is harder to come by
- Lack of live audience
- May be difficult to get questions from the public
- Local League member engagement is minimal
- Candidates can't meet and greet after the event
- Limits access for voters with no access to the internet

### Technical expertise is essential for virtual forums

Leagues that do not have someone who is tech-savvy probably should not attempt to do a virtual event by themselves. Often a school, town, college or local cable access has technology experts who can assist. Community libraries also make great partners for these events as they have technology experts on staff. [Exhibit C: Helpful Hints for Virtual Meetings](#)

### Meet and Greet Event in Person

Several Leagues have opted to sponsor a Meet and Greet Event for a variety of reasons including a large number of candidates or not enough candidates to conduct a forum. This event is open to the public and adheres to the following format:

- Welcome by the League President
- Explanation of format
- Candidate introductions
- Candidate Statements: Each candidate is given a predetermined time to speak, which can be recorded and placed on the League's website or YouTube channel.
- Candidates then move to campaign tables to talk to voters and hand out campaign materials

If any candidate is unable to attend, they may send campaign members to bring materials and speak with voters, but the campaign member should not be permitted to provide a recorded candidate statement. [Exhibit D: Sample Meet and Greet invitation](#)

### Meet Your Candidates Recorded Videos

Another option is to invite candidates to informally respond to questions that are sent to them in advance. Each candidate is recorded individually, and the video is posted on public media. The League's Meet Your Candidate video of successful primary candidates may be made available to the public up to Election Day. Most Leagues use Zoom to record the candidates at a time mutually convenient. Each candidate receives the same questions.

Format for the recorded video:

- Prepare generic slides (see Exhibit K, page 19) that you can use with every candidate that states the office the candidate is running for and that every candidate is being asked the same questions.
- After a short introduction by the League member, the questions will be asked much like they would in a forum, with the candidate given the same amount of time allotted to them to answer the questions. All candidates should be asked the same questions.
- The candidate will have a minute before and after the questions to introduce themselves and present wrap-up comments.
- The League member will close the session and thank the candidate for participating.

To promote civil discourse and debate, candidates should be asked to focus on their own goals and service to their communities and constituencies and refrain from personal attacks on other candidates. *This language should also be added to the forum script and candidate ground rules.*

Candidates are asked **not** to wear any campaign-related clothing and to remove any campaign buttons from their clothing while participating in the video recording. In addition, any background visible on the screen must also be devoid of campaign-related materials. [Exhibit E: Sample Meet Your Candidates Invitation](#)

## **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)**

As in all aspects of League activities, using a lens of diversity, equity and inclusion must be an integral part of the planning process for candidate forums. For example, do those involved in planning and presenting the forum widely reflect the diversity of your community? This would include groups traditionally marginalized, such as people of color, people with disabilities, new citizens who may need language translations, young voters, etc. Reaching out to the diversity of your membership and other community organizations can help formulate questions and engage a diverse audience. Sometimes providing access to all community members is easier in a virtual event where features such as closed captioning are often available.

## **Securing Co-Sponsors**

Work with co-sponsors who are also nonpartisan and do not endorse candidates. They must also agree to adhere to League guidelines for the forum. This includes newspapers that endorse candidates. If the endorsement will precede your forum, the newspaper should not be a co-sponsor.

Co-sponsors can be a part of a panel posing questions but must use questions that have been screened or agreed upon by the League before they are presented to the candidates.

In co-sponsored forums, it is also extremely important that League representatives be involved in all aspects of planning to be sure the forum follows League standards of fairness and nonpartisanship.

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Co-sponsors can increase audience attendance with their outreach to their memberships. Depending on the co-sponsor, their membership may bring different perspectives on the issues and broaden the questions asked of candidates.

Possible NonPartisan Co-Sponsors may include, but are not limited to:

- NAACP
- Fraternities
- Sororities
- Libraries
- Parent Teacher Associations/Organizations (PTA/PTO)

## Inviting Candidates

All candidates for the race must be invited from all political parties, including third party candidates. Write-in candidates may also be invited if they have registered with the local or township clerk by the required deadline date.

Candidates must file a *Candidate Affidavit of Identity* to run for office. This must contain the candidate's name and residential address, a statement that the candidate is a Citizen of the U.S., the title of office sought, including the jurisdiction, district, circuit or ward, political party or statement indicating no party affiliation. Contact information for most candidates (i.e. campaign or personal email address, etc.) can be obtained from the local or township clerk. For judicial candidates, contact the candidate's work address to get campaign and personal contact information.

Local League boards should develop a Candidate Participation Policy for the selection of candidates to participate in a forum, as well as a policy for dealing with the failure of candidates to participate. These policies should be in place well before the election season begins and before invitations are issued. [Exhibit F: Sample Candidate Participation Policy](#)

It is best to contact candidates as early as possible to obtain firm commitments and it's recommended that Leagues have some way of tracking the delivery of the invitation to the candidates. Some email platforms have a mechanism to notify you when a recipient opens the email. Always retain a copy of the email or USPS letter. A firm deadline for confirming their participation should also be included in the invitation. Candidates who don't respond by the deadline should be contacted by telephone. [Exhibit G1: Sample In-Person Forum invitation](#)  
[Exhibit G2: Sample Virtual Forum Invitation](#)

Leagues should be aware that some candidates are being advised to avoid public appearances as part of their campaign strategy, while others are unable to attend because of illness, schedule conflicts or other legitimate explanations. Some Leagues permit a candidate who is not able to participate to submit a brief opening statement to be read only by the moderator. Most Leagues will only announce that the absent person is a candidate for the office.

The invitation to participate should provide the following:

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1. Brief explanation of LWV's purpose
2. Forum format
3. Expectations of candidates
4. Time limits for opening and closing statements and questions
5. Ground rules to be followed by all participating candidates [Exhibit H: Sample Ground Rules and Consent Form](#)

## Gathering Candidate Questions

There are several methods to gather questions for the forum candidates. These include:

- Written questions from the audience, usually submitted on index cards
- Pre-determined questions from a qualified panel or League members
- Solicited questions from the local community via email, social media or Google form (allow sufficient time for submission of questions)
- Questions from Observer Corps members

**Note:** Verbal questions from the audience posed directly to the candidates are not recommended.

There have been instances where candidates request the forum questions in advance. This is **not** recommended. The candidate responses should be spontaneous and not rehearsed. In addition, giving the candidates questions in advance can cause problems about delivery (some candidates may claim they never received the questions, implying favoritism to other candidates). Also, releasing questions in advance eliminates the flexibility of the moderator to change questions at the last minute or omit questions due to time constraints.

There may be times when the media or members of the audience request the questions that were asked of the candidates. There is no obligation to release these questions. Under **no** circumstances should the unused questions be released to anyone.

## Roles and Responsibilities of League Members

A candidate forum requires many League volunteers in various roles.

### League Forum Coordinator

This person is responsible for the overall organization of the forum. This can be a Voter Services leader (i.e. Vice President or Director) or other League member familiar with voting responsibilities

- Prepares forum script with help of moderator
- Starts the forum on time
- Announces the audience to be seated for the forum to begin
- Welcomes those attending
- Explains the process for submitting audience questions
- Introduces the moderator

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## Moderator

The role of the moderator is that of a host and referee. The moderator introduces the candidates, explains the format and procedures of the forum, identifies whose turn it is to speak, ensures fairness, and maintains decorum. The moderator should be a trained League member who has participated or volunteered in past forums. If possible, the moderator should not be a constituent of any candidate appearing at the forum. Consider trading moderators with a neighboring League to avoid any appearance of bias or partisanship.

**Note:** LWVMI has moderator training materials on their website at [lwvmi.org](http://lwvmi.org), under Members, LWV Only. This is a password protected section of the site. The password is available from any local League president or LWVMI Board member.

The moderator usually works closely with the League Voter Service Director or other League member to plan the format of the forum. An experienced moderator may work directly with the organization that is co-sponsoring the event.

### Qualities of a good moderator

- Well prepared
- Professional demeanor and appearance
- Confident
- Sense of humor
- Politically neutral
- Good coping skills

### Role of the Moderator

- Meets with candidates prior to forum to draw lots and confirm names
- Explains the purpose of event and forum format to the audience
- Explains ground rules for audience behavior
- Introduces the candidates\*
- Asks the questions
- Maintains order at all times
- Reins in candidates who don't follow the rules
- Ensures fairness and equal opportunity
- Doesn't show favoritism to any candidate
- Uses question grid to maintain order
- Strictly enforces time limits
- Refrains from judgment
- Is always alert to timekeeper
- Rehearses the script so that it comes naturally, using words with which the moderator is comfortable.

\*When addressing candidates, do not use references to "Judge, Incumbent, Mayor, Doctor or other titles. All candidates should be treated equally and titles may infer a preference or

advantage. Due to the diverse populations we now serve, addressing the person as “Candidate Smith” instead of Ms. or Mr. is more appropriate.

The moderator should use a matrix/grid to keep track of the speaking order of the candidate(s).  
[Exhibit I: Sample Candidate Forum Question Grid](#)

## **Timekeeper**

The role of the timekeeper is to ensure that all candidates are given an equal amount of time to present their information. Timekeeping can be conducted by one person, however, many Leagues find it helpful to use two. The following equipment is used: a timer device and timer cards showing the time remaining and a stop sign 30 seconds (yellow) and stop (red). The timer cards and a timer device are provided by the League. Generally, a one to two minute opening/closing statement and 90-second response to questions is sufficient. The time limits may be adjusted based on the number of candidates.

Duties include:

- Manages time for candidates’ responses
- Confirms with moderator the time allowed for opening statement, closing statement and responses to questions
- Sits in front of candidates so the signs are clearly visible to candidates and moderator
- Starts timer as soon as candidate begins speaking
- After candidate finishes, stops the timing device and zeroes out for next candidate

## **Greeters (in-person forum)**

It is important to have members greet the public and provide directions to the seating area as well as the location for restrooms and emergency exits. Greeters should be located near the entrance to the building. They will ask audience members to remove any partisan clothing or campaign paraphernalia before entering the forum.

## **Question Gatherers (in-person forum)**

For an in-person forum, it is important to have league volunteers secure questions from the audience. Pencils and index cards should be given to attendees. Volunteers then collect the questions from the audience and take them to the question sorters.

## **Question Sorters**

**In-Person Forum:** The role of the question sorters is to review written questions from the audience for readability, duplication and diversity of topics. Those that are inappropriate, slanderous or irrelevant are eliminated. Questions are usually written on notecards, which the sorter reviews and puts in a recommended order for the moderator to present. The moderator may revise some questions, revise the order the questions are presented or reject questions, based upon the dynamics of the event or the amount of time available. If the questions for the forum are solicited in advance, the question sorters will use the same

sorting criteria stated above.

**Virtual Forum:** Question sorters review the questions submitted in advance of the forum, using the same criteria as for the in-person forum. The League can request questions from the public by social media, email or a Google form. There is usually a deadline established to provide the question sorters sufficient time to review prior to the forum event.

### **Identification of League Volunteers**

League volunteers should be identified with a LWV button or name tag. In a virtual forum, the volunteers should be identified as a League member on their screen name.

## **Forum Format**

The format generally consists of the following:

- Introductions
- Opening statements
- Questions and answers
- Closing statements
- Wrap-up and announcements

The amount of time for each component is determined by the amount of time available for the forum, the number of candidates and the preference of the organization sponsoring the event. The order in which the candidates will speak can be determined in different ways, as long as the way chosen is neutral among the candidates. In some situations, it may be feasible to use the ballot order of the candidates. Other times the order is determined just prior to starting the event—drawing from a deck of cards, drawing numbers or straws, etc. The draw sets the speaking order for opening statements, the first question (the speaking order for subsequent questions is rotated), and closing statements. Some candidates express concern about being first or last. Counter this by indicating there is an advantage to having the "first word" and the "last word" but having both by one candidate is never allowed.

Following is a description of each component of a typical forum.

### **Introductions**

The opening speaker, who is a League member, begins the forum with introductions including the moderator, co-sponsors (if applicable) and timekeeper(s). A short statement regarding the League is usually presented. It is highly suggested to add the following statement regarding the video recording:

*This presentation is Copyrighted (Year) by the League of Women Voters. All rights are reserved.*

It is also important to state any disclaimers related to the use of the recording (see page 17 for sample disclaimer language).

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Next, the moderator introduces the candidates. The moderator describes the format and rules of the forum.

### **Opening Statements**

Each candidate will have the opportunity to provide an opening statement. The time allotted is usually 1-2 minutes. Speaking order will be determined in advance (i.e. alphabetical order, by drawing lots or order of appearance on the ballot).

### **Questions and Answers**

The time allotted for questions and answers is determined by the number of candidates and the time available for the event. Generally, the time each candidate is given to answer each question is 60 to 90 seconds.

In candidate forums, the speaking order in which the candidates will answer questions is rotated. The candidate who drew the first speaking order will respond first on the first question; the candidate who drew the second speaking order will answer first on the second question, and so on. It is advisable before asking the question to announce which candidate will answer first so that he/she is prepared to speak. It is helpful to have a grid/rotation guide to keep track of the speaking rotation (see Exhibit I on page 12).

The number of questions presented to the candidates is determined by the moderator based upon the amount of time allotted in the agenda for this portion of the forum. When time has run out, the moderator usually indicates that the final question is being presented.

The moderator, **working with the timekeeper**, must take care to ensure that each candidate is given an equal opportunity to speak. If a candidate does not wrap up his/her statement in the allotted time, the moderator should point out that the speaker's time is up and move on.

### **Closing statements**

Each candidate will have the opportunity to wrap up their remarks with a closing statement. The time allotted is usually 1-2 minutes. The order of remarks could be the reverse of the opening statements or can be a continuation of the regular question rotation.

### **Wrap-up and Announcements**

The League representative wraps up the forum by reminding the audience to vote and announcements that the sponsor requests. Specific information about voting information and resources (Vote411, etc.) should be provided. Take time to thank the candidates for participating, League volunteers for their help and any co-sponsors of the event.

### **Forum Script**

Many coordinators/moderators find it helpful to prepare a script, based on the forum format. When appropriate, the script may be forwarded to the co-sponsor of the event to verify the format and other pertinent information. The script can be tailored depending on whether the forum is in-person or virtual.

- [Exhibit J1: Sample Forum Script](#)
- [Exhibit J2: Sample Forum Script](#)
- [Exhibit J3: Sample Moderator Forum Script](#)
- [Exhibit J4: Sample School Board Script](#)

At a minimum, the forum script should include the following:

- Welcome/Opening remarks
- Housekeeping details
- Purpose of forum
- LWV nonpartisan policy
- Disclaimer on use of video recording
- Co-sponsors (if any)
- Ground Rules
- Disclaimer of accuracy of candidates' statements
- Forum format (opening/closing statements and question process)
- Audience behavior
- Wrap-up: Election Day information, thank the candidates, volunteers, polling place hours, Vote411 information, etc.

### **Disclaimer of Accuracy of Candidates' Statements**

It is important that the League provide a disclaimer statement regarding the accuracy of candidates' statements during the forum. Here is an example of disclaimer language to include in the forum script and with the forum video recording.

*The League of Women Voters (local League name) provides this forum as an opportunity for candidates to express their views related to their candidacy. Statements expressed by the candidates are not endorsed nor opposed by the League. Also, the League of Women Voters does not certify any candidate responses to questions as accurate. Voters are encouraged to fact-check information shared at the forum.*

**Note:** Candidates shall **not** wear any campaign-related clothing or campaign buttons while participating in the forum. This is also true for members of the audience. No campaign literature, campaign shirts, hats, buttons, etc. are permitted in the forum room. It is appropriate to have campaign literature outside of the forum room location (i.e. in a hallway, etc.).

## **Technical Requirements**

### **In-Person Forums**

When selecting a location for the forum, it is important to consider the availability of audio equipment such as microphones, recording/live streaming capabilities, etc. Video recording the forum is optional, not required. However, a recording of the event reaches a wider audience and provides important candidate information to those unable to attend. Most Leagues either

hire a videographer or have a member record the forum. Some libraries have audio/video and recording capabilities. If the venue is a local school building or library, these locations sometimes have the ability to live stream the event. Local school systems also have audio/visual departments that may be willing to provide videographer services for free or a minimal charge. Only those individuals specifically authorized by the League may video record a candidate event. Under no circumstances should a candidate's videographer record the forum. A reminder to the audience that the recording of the event (via cell phone or other device) is prohibited should be included in the forum script introduction.

Forums can be live and/or recorded, broadcast or streamed. A live broadcast can be seen immediately as it happens. Live streaming is when video appears on the internet in real-time. Forums should be recorded for viewing on the League's website or YouTube channel.

### **Protecting Your Video Recordings From Unauthorized Use**

You can protect your YouTube video from being used in Clips ([read about Clips](#)) and the help video for that: <https://youtu.be/TliVMLHfrkQ>.

You can prevent downloads of your video recording on YouTube by changing the privacy settings. However, this doesn't 100% prevent someone from using other software or devices to download, copy, or screen-record their own copy of the video.

YouTube encrypts their data, and a service like [Cincopa](#) offers more aggressive encryption, but it still may not fully prevent someone from making or editing copies of your video recording.

### **Helpful Hints for Virtual Forums**

#### **Audio**

Most modern computers have fairly good microphones. You can also use fully charged earphones with a built-in microphone. The most important thing is for the candidate to be in a quiet room with no audio distractions. Usually any audio issues can be corrected without much difficulty.

It is helpful for a technical person to meet online with the candidates in advance of the forum to review audio and visual requirements. This is especially true for those who are not familiar with the virtual format.

#### **Mute**

The mute button is frequently one's best friend. It cuts down on distracting background noise for the other participants. All candidates should be muted prior to the start of the forum and only unmute themselves when it is their time to speak.

#### **Visual Location:**

Participants (candidates and League members) should sit facing a large window which provides natural light. If not available, place a lamp behind your laptop. Avoid clothes with distracting

patterns-solid colors are best. The camera should be at or just above eye level using a stack of books, a stool or a higher table to ensure the camera is correctly positioned.

### **Pre-Forum Meeting**

Invite the candidates to join the meeting at least 20 minutes prior to the start of the forum. This provides the opportunity to remind them of the ground rules, draw lots to determine the speaking order and other housekeeping details. It also functions as an audio-visual test to make sure the lighting is adequate, the audio is working and there are no campaign materials in sight.

### **Identify the host/moderator.**

This is the traffic cop for the forum. It can be either the person who organized the forum or the moderator. Either way, it should be made clear at the start of the forum who will be taking on that role.

### **Audience Participation**

If the public is invited, the forum is considered an “open” event. There may be a space limitation on the virtual account (i.e. 100 people), so pre-registration may be necessary. Also, the public attendees should be muted and their video turned off so there is no disruption during the forum.

The chat function should be disabled to prohibit questions/comments from the audience. If the Zoom account has a Q & A function, this will permit screening the questions by the host(s) before being sent to the moderator. During the forum, it would be helpful to use cell phone texting to communicate between the host(s).

A recording should be made available to the public for those who could not attend.

If the public **is not** invited, the forum is considered a “closed” event and a recording should be made available for public viewing after the event. Questions are solicited from the public in advance and are sorted by designated League members.

### **Timer**

Toastmasters has developed a very handy way to time speakers using the virtual background tool. A helpful explanation of how to use this method can be found at [Virtual Background Timer Feature](#).

### **End of Virtual Forum**

Make sure the forum ends with a “thank you” to the candidates, League members and co-sponsors (if applicable). It should also provide information on Election Day voting hours (including 9 days of early voting) and Vote411 information.

- [Exhibit K: Sample Virtual Forum Slides](#)
- [Exhibit K1: Sample Virtual Forum Protocol](#)

## Potential Problems

Oftentimes, groups or individuals want to distribute literature before or during the forum. To ensure fairness and minimize distraction, it is recommended that distribution of literature not be permitted until after the forum. Instead, set up a table near the exit where literature (including League information) may be picked up as people leave.

Despite a moderator's efforts to maintain decorum, forums occasionally become heated and emotional. If participants or the audience become uncontrollable, the moderator may find it necessary to call a recess to quiet things down or adjourn the forum entirely. [Exhibit L: How to Handle Potential Problems](#)

## Promoting the Forum

The purpose of forum promotion includes the following:

- Help attract media attention
- Alert the community to the event's purpose
- Get people excited and aware of the forum
- Reach as wide an audience as possible

Publicity can be in many forms:

- Social Media posts with eye-catching graphics
- Press releases to local newspapers and other media outlets
- Paper flyers distributed in the community
- Event announcements on local television and radio stations

Vote411 has two mechanisms to promote the forum and share the recording. There is a calendar option where you can have the date(s) of your forum event(s) entered. You can also have LWVUS post your forum video recording on Vote411 for future voters to view.

- [Exhibit M1: Sample Press Release](#)
- [Exhibit M2 Sample Press Release](#)
- [Exhibit N1 Sample Promotional Flier](#)
- [Exhibit N2: Sample Promotional Flier](#)

## Post event

The League should send thank you letters to each candidate, co-sponsors, moderator, committee volunteers, staff at the on-site location, videographer and others responsible for the success of the event. A debrief should be conducted to determine what worked and what could be improved to assist in future planning. This information, including copies of candidate letters, contracts, PR clippings, financial report, evaluation etc. should be completed and filed. In addition, the video recording should be posted on the League's website and/or YouTube channel. Also, a link to the recording should be sent to the candidates for posting on their website, with a reminder of the disclaimer language as it appears on page 17.

Questions about information in this guide can be directed to Judy Florian, VP for Voter Services of LWVMI.