

# **Rules for Organizations Requesting LWVGB Participation in a Candidate Forum**

**Approved by LWVGB Board April 28, 2015**

The League of Women Voters has a long and successful history conducting and moderating candidate forums. Allowing the public to hear directly from candidates who wish to serve the public is extremely valuable in evaluating candidates. The most important consideration in any debate or forum is fair treatment of the candidates and organized execution of the debate.

The League has years of experience in planning and executing debates in a fair, consistent manner. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with community organizations in planning and conducting the forum.

**Please contact us as soon as you begin planning a debate.**

## **THE LEAGUE'S PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES**

The League is strictly nonpartisan and is unable to serve as co-sponsor or moderator of any candidate forum that is co-hosted or in any way organized by a partisan group or organization. Hosts and sponsors cannot have endorsed any candidate or made statements in support or opposition of any candidate in the election. This includes statements against an opposing party or party's candidate. The League will not co-sponsor a candidate forum with any group whose leadership has made public statements for or against any candidate, or which is known to support a candidate informally, or that advocates for an issue on the ballot.

The League's role is to ensure that all candidates on the ballot in the election are invited and the actual forum is conducted with fairness to all candidates.

The League can collaborate in planning the format and executing a candidate forum only if League rules for the forum are agreed upon by all co-hosts / co-sponsors.

The League will not participate in an "empty chair" candidate forum. It is not necessary that all candidates accept the invitation and appear at the forum. However, in the event that only one candidate in a race appears, the forum, or the portion of the forum dedicated to that race, will be canceled.

The League will not accept any money for moderating a candidate forum, nor will the League furnish any payment for costs of executing the forum.

## **INVITATIONS TO CANDIDATES – ENSURING FAIR PARTICIPATION**

The League will secure all candidates' addresses and send official invitations not later than three weeks prior to the candidate forum, and send an official press release not later than one week prior to the candidate forum.

## **FORUM HALL GUIDELINES**

Hosts and sponsors agree not to share any politically partisan messages inside the event hall/room and to encourage all candidates and their parties to refrain from campaigning inside the event hall/room. Campaign messages, written or spoken, should be shared only outside of the event hall/room. No promotional or candidate material will be distributed within the event hall/room prior to, during, or after the candidate forum.

Tables should be provided by the organizer outside of the door to the event hall/room for candidates' promotional materials.

## **AT THE FORUM EVENT**

The League retains full control over the conduct of the forum.

All forum hosting and sponsoring organizations and the forum moderator (if not moderated by the League) must agree to all League rules for the forum.

The event manager (the person representing the group that secured the facility for the forum) or host will introduce the League moderator (or if the League is not moderating, the League representative). In the interest of conserving time, only one person will be allowed at the podium to introduce the League representative and/or moderator.

The League reserves the right to set time limits for the forum, including, but not restricted to, the length of the forum, time allowed for the welcome, introductions, messaging and other preliminary statements prior to the official beginning of the forum, and time allowed for candidate statements and responses.

Once the moderator is introduced, the candidate forum officially begins and no further messages will be shared by hosts or sponsors until the forum has ended.

The moderator will state the League's nonpartisan statement and the rules of the forum prior to the start of questioning or prior to the opening statements if those are to be made by the candidates.

Candidates will be introduced by the moderator using a candidate-submitted biography of not more than 150 words.

The moderator will question the candidates using questions submitted in writing by the audience before and during the forum. The League will review submitted questions and selected questions will be posed to the candidates as time permits. The League reserves the right to decline to use certain questions. The League also reserves the right to supplement with its own questions. No aural questions from the audience will be solicited or allowed.

Candidates will be given equal time for answering questions. The candidates will also be allowed equal time for opening and/or closing statements if the number of candidates per race and time permits. The League will announce whether or not the candidates will make these statements when the rules are explained.

Time allotted for answers will depend on the number of candidates and the time allotted for the entire forum. You are encouraged to allow plenty of time for numerous questions. This is of particular importance when the number of candidates is large.

Candidates will respond to questions in rotation, based on the rules established by the League. An order will be established by drawing a number at the beginning of the forum. Approximately half way through the questioning period, the order will be reversed.

A League timekeeper will keep strict time for candidate responses. A sign will be visible when the candidate's time is running out. Candidates will be required to strictly adhere to these limits and stop talking when the "STOP" sign is raised.

The moderator will officially end the forum at the close of the last question and answer rotation or, if allowed, at the end of closing statements.

**The League reserves the right to withdraw participation at any time if agreed-upon rules are broken by the hosts or sponsors.**