Candidate Debates, Forums & Events
Guidelines for Local Leagues
2016

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that was founded 96 years ago to encourage informed citizen participation in government. It has sponsored numerous candidate debates and forums at the national, state and local level. Since 1976, the League of Women Voters Education Fund has sponsored at least 24 presidential primaries, all nationally televised. In 1992, state and local Leagues sponsored more debates and forums than any other organization in the United States. The LWV does not endorse, oppose, or support candidates or political parties. It is the intent of a candidate debate/forum to provide an opportunity for the candidates to provide their views on important issues facing citizens. The public holds the League in high regard for its work on candidate debates and forums and for its commitment to follow best practices to ensure a fair and well executed event. Debate/forum rules are designed to continue this respected tradition.

These guidelines are intended to provide LWV members information about how to plan for and conduct candidates’ forums and debates. Forums and debates should provide voters with information about candidates and issues while avoiding any partisan positions and while providing equal time for those seeking office. Consult the LWVNC president or Voter Services chair with questions.
DEBATE, FORUM or other NON-DEBATE CANDIDATE APPEARANCE? This is for you to decide. A debate has some back and forth; candidates can respond to each other. A forum is more scripted, with no candidate back-and-forth, and is easier to control. (Many Leagues say ‘forum’ but provide chances for rebuttal; call it what you will, it IS a debate.) See the section on formats on p 8.

Debate: The Federal Election Commission (FEC) defines a debate as an event that:
- Includes at least 2 candidates for the same office
- Is staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another
- Allows the candidates to appear concurrently, in face to face conversations, with opportunities to respond to each other

Non-Debate Candidate Appearances (candidate forums, meet-and-greet opportunities):
Other formats outside those described above are considered ‘Non-debate Candidate Appearances’ – defined as a place, meeting or medium where ideas and views on a particular issue are exchanged. A forum consists of consecutive candidate interviews/questions and responses with no planned opportunities for a candidate to respond to other candidates.

League must adhere to all FEC, FCC and IRS guidelines when hosting activities for federal level candidates. Since NC has no set rules beyond federal ones, LWV recommends that best practices, particularly the maintenance of nonpartisanship, should be scrupulously maintained in state and local level debates and forums as well.

You cannot have only 1 candidate in a particular race on stage alone. A debate may not be held, according to the FEC and Federal Communication Commission (FCC) rules, if an unopposed candidate appears (including a no-show by opposing candidates). That means also, if you are conducting primary debates, that you cannot have 1 Dem and 1 Rep together, since they are running in different races. Unopposed candidates might be invited to meet and greet attendees at the end of another candidate forum/debate and/or contribute a statement to your Voters’ Guide. To maintain non-partisanship, no candidate forum should be held when only one candidate per race is present. (See discussion under Empty Chair, p 9)

LWVUS has some great resources to guide you: Candidate Debates/Forums/Fairs. Additionally, staff at the League national office are available to answer questions and provide guidance. Read Face to Face thoroughly. Your familiarity with the many facets of running a debate or forum will put you at ease and inspire confidence in others working with you.

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

Leagues can use 501 (c)(3) or 501 (c)(4) funds for debates and non-debate candidate appearances.
- Using 501 (c)(4) funds allows a League to ask audience to become members of the League.
- Using 501 (c)(3) monies from the Education Fund allows the League to solicit tax-exempt donations from local businesses and donors.
PLANNING

Decide on a forum/debate you want to conduct. This should be done in the SPRING or EARLY SUMMER for fall elections, in LATE FALL for primary events. (Face to Face suggests getting started a year ahead.) Know the candidate filing deadlines and election dates. For all elections, early voting begins Thursday of the week 2 weeks prior to the election. Follow the offices where there are contested races. Sometimes candidates, municipalities, or others will ask the League to take on a debate/forum. Sometimes members from a community will ask. Some may be appropriate to do and not others. In some instances, you may want to determine if candidates want a forum or debate sponsored by the LWV. If that’s the case, canvass the candidates for a general idea of their participation.

Get approval from the board or from the executive committee (if appropriate) of your League before any commitments are made. In addition, contact the League member doing outreach and PR for League functions. Be ready to send details later and to review a press release.

Decide if you want a partner or co-sponsor(s). Again, this needs to be done at the beginning of planning. Co-sponsors, if chosen wisely, add credibility to the event, add an element of joint commitment with a partner, and show the League knows how to work with others. Never partner with a partisan group or one that endorses candidates. Never partner with a group that wants to do an inappropriate format for the League. A partner cannot make or have made an endorsement during the entire election cycle. The partnership must not impact the League’s nonpartisan status or integrity.

Sign (or have an email trail of agreement for) a Memorandum of Understanding with your co-sponsors, whether they be a broadcast/cable station, web site, another civic organization, or a group or individual who is taping your debate/forum. This should include:

- League must withdraw from an ‘empty chair’ (1 candidate) debate or forum.
- Stipulation about debate broadcast in entirety (more on p 9)
- The use of League logo on materials to be distributed. Follow How to Use the Name and Logo.
- (If appropriate) Who makes decisions about question selection and format

If you are working with a television, cable or radio station or website, state in your agreement that NO political ads, even for other offices, may be broadcast during, immediately before or after the debate or on the web page where the recording is posted. Agree to air the debate as soon as possible after it is taped if it is not aired live. Make arrangements for the tape of the debate to be available online, and provide a link on your League website to the debate.

Establish a working committee for each debate/forum. Identify a lead person. Delegating responsibilities and communications is critical to success. This can be a combination of LWV members interested and in the geographic area of the event as well as representatives of any co-sponsoring group. There are many jobs to fill, so line up other LWV and co-sponsor members to help: publicity, vetting questions, greeting (either candidates or the public), timing, overseeing candidate campaign tables (if allowed), etc.

Be prepared with some ideas of what the League can do and what the partner might help do, such as finding/providing a site, contacting the candidates, publicity, help with soliciting questions, signs, and some communications with candidates. Decide who does what and how to stay in touch. Be prepared with a list of roles and responsibilities and an idea of how this might work. Share in decision making, site selection, questioning protocol, etc. (example detail sheet of responsibilities in appendix, p 12)
Set a timeline for getting everything accomplished. Assign responsibilities clearly and see that all is being done on time. (example tracking form/ timeline in appendix, p 13)

Select a location, a date, and a time. Reserve the site. Any venue such as an in-studio television facilities, community center or retirement home with good public access may be used for debates for federal, state or local races. For federal races the Federal Elections Commission (FEC) mandates that ALL non-debate candidate events and scheduled public appearances of candidates, e.g., a forum or a ‘meet and greet’, MUST be held at a tax-exempt institution such as a school, college or university. For state or local races it is best to hold a non-debate event in a location that is accessible to the public.

(1) Select a location. Do this with the partner(s)/co-sponsor(s). If you will ask for audience questions and know the format of the candidate event, find a site that will suit your needs. Select a site where the audience and the candidates are going to be comfortable and be able to see, hear and identify one another. A raised platform for seating the candidates for a debate or forum is preferable but not always possible. Provide microphones so candidates can be heard. Provide tables and chairs or podiums for the candidates. Have a podium for the moderator at the site. Look for public venues such as college or school halls. Be aware that some places might want the League to pay for parking, insurance and the room. LWV will have to approve expenses before any obligation is made.

Determine what signs will be needed at the chosen site to direct the public to the right entrance, the right room, etc. These should be part of what you take to the event to help the public attending.

(2) Set a date that will accommodate the candidates, the site and the co-sponsors. For a particular debate or forum where incumbents might have conflicts with on-going duties and dates, take those into consideration too. For example, if the office is for city council, don’t set a day of the week when city council routinely meets. Check with others who do candidate events in the area to be sure yours does not conflict with dates they have selected. For instance, in Wilmington, NAACP organizes forums, and WHQR often does forums. For municipal elections in Wilmington, Residents of Old Wilmington also offer forums. If possible, any date of a debate or forum should be BEFORE early voting begins. Keep the site contact informed as things progress.

Gather questions. League members may choose to create some questions. Some special stream such as an email account or web site such as Facebook may be set up for submitting questions. If there are several debates/forums, it is important to be able to sort those questions as they come in. Decide if you will require citizen name and address. (This is particularly important where candidates are representing only a specific district. Do you want to allow questions from outsiders?)

Select questions for the forum or debate. You may wish to first consider what are the important topics to cover. One method for sorting questions, when you clearly have more questions than can be asked in the allotted time, is to type out a list without attribution with plenty of empty space in between and cut out each question for the committee that is sorting. Put them into piles for agreed upon categories. Then go through the categories and decide where there is duplication, any inappropriate questions, confusing or ambiguous questions, etc. Begin selecting your top priorities per category and put them into a final pile with a top priority question from each category and so forth. LWVUS has a good set of questions online at Sample Questions for Debates and Voters’ Guides.

Using audience questions: Ask that audience questions be submitted on notecards. State that the League will review, select and edit, if necessary, all questions submitted. Decide if you will require name and address. Decide if audience members or the moderator will read the questions.
**Choose a professional, experienced moderator.** An unprofessional or unpolished moderator can leave the public and the candidates with a bad taste. Your moderator should be familiar with the League’s nonpartisan position and must be able to nicely interrupt and keep the debate in line.

**Advertise.** Send the media contact person for your local League relevant details on the debate(s) / forum(s). She or he will send out press releases for the event to the media. Post information on your website and Facebook page, use social media such as Twitter, and inform your local online community calendar. Also consider asking radio stations to run a PSA. *Media require a minimum of two weeks notice.* Flyers need to get out to storefronts, libraries, community organizations, clubhouses, etc. Brainstorm with co-sponsors where possible about how to publicize the event. Remember to incorporate the League logo (and your League name) in all promotional materials. See *How to Use the Name and Logo* for proper logo use. *(publicity letter for editorial submission and poster examples in appendix, pp 14-15)*

**Prepare rules for the audience.** To encourage a civilized debate establish audience rules.

- Refrain from applauding or in other ways demonstrating support or non-support for a candidate.
- Cell phones may not be used during the debate.
- There is to be no taping of the debate by audience members. *Announce at the beginning of the debate that cell phones should be turned off as a matter of courtesy and that unauthorized videos are not allowed because the FCC requires that a debate must not be edited and must be broadcast in its entirety, either live or reasonably soon after it takes place.*
- Tell the audience who is co-sponsoring, who is moderating, thank the site management for their help, thank the candidates for coming, and tell them how you arrived at the questions being offered at the event.
- Mention that there will be no distribution of campaign materials allowed within the forum/debate hall. *(This means a judgment call. Is there room for materials to be left outside the hall? On tables at the back?)* You do not want distribution of materials to be intrusive.
- This is YOUR opportunity to say a little about the League.

**Make sure all is arranged.** Simultaneously, meet with the committee to further define roles. Meet with co-sponsors to check on progress and ensure each knows its responsibilities. See your location site again and check with your contact prior to make sure all is in order. Decide who will do what: timing, collecting and sorting audience questions, greeting candidates and providing water, having name cards made for the table, bringing League signs, placing name cards for candidates, showing candidates the timing device, setting up room, cleanup, etc. Also, make sure the BOE does not have any changes like dropped candidates. Check out the site again. Make sure the candidates and the moderator can be clearly heard. Microphones are essential unless it’s a very small room. A tablet with an app that candidates can see makes a good timing device. Yellow \[x \text{ seconds left}\] and red \[\text{stop}\] cards are traditional League signs for candidate debates.

**The evening of the debate/forum check that all’s in place:**

- Have volunteers there early.
- Consider using a table covering, especially if televised.
- Supply water for candidates.
- Have name cards ready to place alphabetically or as determined by draw (if that’s what you decide). Group by the race, e.g. mayoral candidates together then council, etc.
- Check PA system.
- Decide on placement of LWV sign(s).
• Have notecards and pencils ready for any public questions that might be solicited. Tell those writing questions that they must be suitable for all to reply to and not be candidate specific. If you have ample questions ahead of time, use a method to fairly sort these questions.
• Review timing procedures with candidates.
• The moderator or debate organizer needs to speak with the candidates before the debate to be sure everyone understands the order for the evening and all procedures. The moderator needs to know the pronunciation of each candidate’s name.
• State audience rules before the debate begins.
• You may choose to hand out ballot information at the events.
• Be prepared to respond to unforeseen problems if they arise.
• If, in one evening, you are holding sequential forums/debates (e.g., NC Senate and House races) and questions will be often the same for both races, sequester the second group of candidates so they do not hear what the first group answers. That would be an unfair advantage.

WORKING WITH CANDIDATES

Get the list of candidates. Find out the filing deadline date from your County Board of Elections (BOE). Request from your BOE the candidate list that includes addresses and phone numbers. Note that it’s unlikely to have email addresses. (The BOE websites of the counties and the state can be a great resource for information.) Create a spreadsheet/tracking form of candidates where you can keep track of correspondence. (See example in appendix, p 13.)

Decide which candidates to invite. For local and district elections, you will usually decide to invite all candidates. For state and federal elections, you may wish to rely on candidate criteria for inclusion. Criteria for eligibility should be tailored to the race and decided before invitations are sent out.

The criteria for eligibility use viewpoint-neutral criteria to determine candidate participation. The burden rests with the candidate to make a showing of compliance with these criteria. (See example in appendix, p 16.)

• Constitutional eligibility: The candidate, if elected, must be legally qualified to hold office under federal, state and/or local law.
• Eligibility to be on ballot: The candidate must have correctly and properly filed all documents required by the State Board of Elections in compliance with state law by the mandated deadline. Write-in candidates, under normal circumstances, are not considered eligible.
• Evidence of a campaign: The candidate has made a public announcement of an intention to run; the candidate has a legally registered committee and has filed appropriate financial reports. The candidate and supporters should be campaigning throughout the state for statewide office or the appropriate district for local or countywide elections. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, statewide distribution of signatures on nominating petitions, statewide distribution of volunteers and contributors, presence of a headquarters, campaign staff, an informative website, issuance of position papers, and statewide campaign appearances.

ADJUST FOR COUNTY AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

• “Significant” candidacy: A candidate must demonstrate significant voter interest and support. The following are among the factors that should be considered to determine if the candidate has demonstrated “significance”:
a. Results of major, reliable, nonpartisan, independent statewide, public opinion poll that shows a minimum level of support of (5-10%) percent at the time of selection. *Possible polling sources include professional pollsters, independent newspapers, broadcasters and universities.*

b. Candidate is in an election to represent a political party that gathered (2-5%) percent or more voter support in the previous election.

c. Coverage by media-statewide media for state and national office and local for local and county as a recognized Candidate with district-wide support.

**LWVNC will exercise its “good faith judgment” in applying factors to determine “significance.”**

Percentage criteria (above) are at your discretion. Requiring a poll showing support may be inappropriate for local races. You may invite a candidate before determining if s/he has met the criteria. Be sure to state in your invitation that the candidate’s inclusion is contingent on their meeting the criteria and that the burden of proof rests with them. (You may, in fact, gather the information yourself, but asking a candidate to report the various campaigning activities s/he has been engaged in can save you a lot of time.) Every effort must be made to include all candidates identified as eligible under your eligibility criteria.

**Invite candidates:** For general election debates, contact candidates in LATE SUMMER or EARLY FALL; for primaries, in JANUARY after the filing deadline. If you decide to use email, the forum coordinator or a committee member will need to call each candidate and get an email address. Prepare a statement to read to each candidate, stating who you are, what you represent, some details about the debate/forum, including the date, time and place, and the fact that you will be communicating with him/her using email. Ask for a verbal commitment for their participation. Set a deadline for their response. *(See appendix p 17 for sample script for initial contact.)*

*It is recommended that Leagues use a traceable form of mail delivery (e.g., USPS delivered, signed mail receipt or email returned mail receipt) to invite and correspond with candidates.* Use League letterhead. Use an email group list to assure all candidates that there is no favoritism. Attach to your email invitation to attend the debate/forum pdf copies of Terms of Participation/Agreement, Statement of Eligibility (Criteria for Inclusion) and Debate Ground Rules. Copy any co-sponsors in your correspondence or keep them up-to-date on your progress, depending on their preference. Sign your email with your name, Voter Services, your League name and your contact information should they have questions or problems before the event. *(sample invitation letter in appendix p 18)*

Agreement or Terms of Participation includes debate specifics and is signed by each candidate and the sponsoring organization(s). Include the date and time of the debate, when to arrive, define the format (generally or specifically), the name of the moderator, specify how candidate order is decided and time-up notifications are handled, and a few other rules, e.g., no surrogates, if and where campaign materials are allowed, and that all cell phone and pager devices should be turned off during debates to maintain the integrity of the event. The agreement should also specify the type of advertising the League plans for the event. Add the statement (required by the National League) that disallows any use of the League name in future campaign materials that would suggest any endorsements from the League, that the debate will only be made available in its entirety, and that candidates may not use excerpts of the debate in any campaign advertising although they may link to the entire debate if it is available. *(See appendix, p 19 for example.)*

Some candidates may wish to negotiate your Terms/Agreement. This is not unusual, particularly for a candidate who is running well ahead of others in the race. Compromise if you must to get that
important candidate to agree to come to your debate or forum. Then let others know that the terms have been changed. This may require another round of signatures.

(1) Ask in your email that a signed copy of the Terms or Agreement be returned by your deadline. (This may be in person, by mail, fax or digital copy.) Once you have received signed Terms your president (and a leader of your co-sponsor or media outlet [TV, radio]) should countersign and return a copy to the candidates.

-or-

(2) If your relationship is local and friendly, you may simply request that the candidates acknowledge they agree in writing (email, etc.) in lieu of getting a signed copy of the Terms or Agreement.

Debate Ground Rules set the stage. These should be clearly stated and included in early correspondence with the candidates. There are lots of examples of ground rules in Face to Face. Although the LWV does not require that you follow all the ground rules they list, they make for a more controlled debate atmosphere. Ground rules include:

- Moderator responsibilities, e.g., restating questions, interrupting if candidate not answering the question
- Time for answers, rebuttals (if you have them), closing statements
- Guidelines for responses (e.g., on topic), closing statements
- No personal attacks
- If and where campaign banners, signs, literature handouts or other campaign paraphernalia will be allowed, but usually not in the debate hall
- To consider: Campaign buttons or not? Sitting or standing? Prepared notes or materials allowed to be brought in?

(The LWV list of Debate Ground Rules is in the appendix, p 21.) These are a good starting point for you to develop your own.

Candidates may also want to know, if there are co-sponsors of the event, who will be moderating and get some idea of your advertising of the forum. It’s best that a majority of candidates expresses an interest in participating. Be consistent with candidates. For suggestions, see Guidance for Leagues on Candidates Unwilling to Participate in Voter Education Opportunities by the LWV on their website.

Reply to RSVPs individually. This is the only email sent to each candidate individually. However, you may get a question or two from a candidate that requires a specific response. Keep a paper trail. Candidate inquiries should be answered by email and if the answer isn’t immediately known the text can be something like, “Thank you for your enthusiasm. We do not have everything in place at this time. We will update you as soon as possible.”

Send a second letter to candidates. This should restate or outline in more detail (if necessary) the format for the forum or debate and it should also talk about any rules once again. They have signed your Terms but may not have recalled the details. It’s best to have no surprises.

Keep a record of contacts and replies. Use a tracking form for recording all contacts with the candidates and for information for candidates. (example tracking form in the appendix, p 14)
FORMAT

Although forums seem easier to facilitate, if you are comfortable allowing some candidate interaction, thereby making your meeting into a debate, your event can be more engaging for candidates and your audience. The order of candidates (seating, for questions and closing statements) is best determined by a draw. A debate or forum should be staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another.

**Debates:** Format may vary. Develop a robust format. Read Changing Trends in Formats, Chapter 4 in *Face to Face* to get some ideas of what will give spark to your debate and be something you can manage.

**Forums:** All candidates should be asked the same questions and have the same period of time to answer. This is strictly non-partisan and fair. Candidate interaction is not planned or encouraged.

**Candidate introductions** may best be done by the moderator to save time for questions.

**How many questions?** If you are taping your debate/forum for broadcast, you will have to be very mindful of time; if you are not, you can let the program be longer by a few minutes. Determine what’s a reasonable time to answer a question. (1 minute, 90 seconds?) Will each candidate answer each question or will you cycle through questions and candidates, allowing rebuttals? Then figure the time needed to read the questions. Remember that some candidates will answer in less time than allotted. Be sure to have more questions in case things move more quickly.

One way to offer candidate rebuttals in a controllable manner is to allot a number of rebuttal cards to each candidate at the beginning of your debate. You may choose to have different segments of your debate (e.g., moderator-posed questions and audience questions) and allot a certain number of (e.g., 30 second) rebuttals per section. Try to give the candidates an idea of how many questions you expect to cover so they are not left with unused rebuttal cards. Let candidates decide when it’s important to challenge their opponent, and have someone keep track of how many rebuttals each candidate has used. Notify candidates when you are at your last question in each section.

Allow time (1 or 2 minutes?) for closing comments by each candidate.

Once you have established a format, be sure to specify it in your Terms of Participation. You need not spell out everything, but give a clear, honest description of the way the forum/debate will be held.

**Candidate Meet & Greets:** This is a more open format and does not require that an opponent (if there is none) be present for state or local races, but for the sake of preserving League nonpartisanship, having at least 2 candidates per race (if there are 2 or more) is required for federal races and strongly recommended for state and local races. All candidates must be invited, and this should be stated in opening remarks by the facilitator. Candidates may make statements only if at least 2 candidates/race are present. Otherwise they may only mingle and talk with the audience. If media is present, be mindful of the appearance of non-partisanship. Use good judgment when deciding how to organize a meet & greet.

An example of meet & greet round robin/speed dating was used very effectively by LWV Charlotte/Mecklenburg. Ten candidates vied for 4 school board seats with no primary. The planning team came up with a format that fit the circumstance. All candidates were invited; each made a 2-minute opening statement. [This worked because all candidates came.] Voters took their places at 10 round tables set up around the room, and an LWVCM facilitator at each table presented the same 3 prepared questions. The candidates rotated through all 10 tables. They could also take individual
BROADCASTING/MEDIA DISTRIBUTION OF YOUR DEBATE OR FORUM

The League wants to ensure that information is not manipulated to create false or misleading impressions. Airing and rebroadcasting the debate can be done with a local radio, TV or cable station and made available on their and the LWV website. Determine who will own the recorded material. (Sometimes a broadcast station, which has costs associated with the broadcast, may wish to own the recording. Be sure LWV has the right to post access to the recording on its website.)

- Broadcasting by media can be done only with the express prior written approval of the League.
- The League will identify a point person for media inquiries and issues related to pre and post event media opportunities/photos.
- FCC mandates that debates must be broadcast in their entirety except by media reporting on the event in “real time”.
- NO political ads, even for other offices, may be broadcast during, immediately before or after the debate or on the web page where the recording is posted.
- For ease of access, the debate may be posted in labeled segments but cannot be abridged, edited or altered.
- Broadcast must be live or reasonably soon after the debate takes place.
- Prior to the debate and or non-debate appearance, the candidates must sign a League-approved release form acknowledging that they cannot use pieces of the debate in their campaign materials.
- Media reporting the forum may record and use excerpts for their news coverage.
- A copyright notice will appear on all copies of tapes, DVDs and transcripts asserting copyright ownership by the League if made other than by media outlets.
- Restrictions on release should be included in the agreement/terms of participation for the debate.

Concerning the audience

- There will be no audience reaction shots during the debate, although panning of the audience before and after the debate may be allowed.
- The moderator should alert the audience at regular intervals about disallowing any recording.

EMPTY CHAIR

Both the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and Federal Communication Commission (FCC) rules define a debate as more than one candidate. If an unopposed candidate were to appear at an LWV candidate forum, it could be interpreted as a contribution to that candidate and jeopardize the League's 501(c)(3) status and nonpartisanship reputation. FCC regulations also preclude broadcast coverage of only one candidate. Instead, you might invite unopposed candidates to meet and greet attendees at the end of another candidate debate or forum and/or contribute a statement to your Voters’ Guide.

A debate should not start if only one candidate is present. There can be no ‘stand-in’ for a candidate who does not show. There is no guarantee that the “late” candidate will ever arrive. Your event can be delayed for a "reasonable amount" of time if one candidate is late and should NOT start until there are questions from the voters when time allowed.
at least two candidates for the same race. The moderator can explain without bias that the debate is delayed awaiting the arrival of the other candidate. To begin with only one candidate would provide that candidate extra exposure and could be interpreted by the public as bias and by the FEC as a campaign contribution. If the debate includes candidates running for several different offices, the debate might begin with races for other offices and a deviation from the listed program announced.

**State and Local Level Races** – If only one candidate attends it is recommended that the debate not proceed, but be rescheduled. If more than one candidate is present, the debate can proceed. While not encouraged, as allowed by state law an empty chair debate could be conducted only if one or more candidates pull out of a scheduled debate after agreeing to participate, and rescheduling is not feasible. In conducting any empty chair debate, the League should maintain, to the extent practicable, the debate format. The moderator and other panelists, therefore, should ask nonpartisan questions, the length of the candidate’s response should be limited, and if possible, the moderator and other panelists should ask probing questions and follow-up questions.

**USING THE PRESS/MEDIA**

- Issuance of invitations and candidate responses should be announced via press release, League website and social media if available.
- Correspondence by the League should be in writing to maintain a clear record.
- Correspondence must include the **Terms of Participation/Agreement** consistently spelled out in the same manner to each candidate.
- All outreach (letters, emails, etc.) should be documented and retained for a period of 5 year(s) in League files and made available to League Board members upon request.
- Queries from Candidates and/or media should be referred to the League President or designee.

**FINAL TOUCHES**

**After the debate or forum thank the participants.** Do this by email. Remember, these folks put a lot on the line to run for office. They have paid to be on the ballot, they are hard at work campaigning and they were willing to be queried about their views. That is not easy, but most appropriate to do if they want to hold a public office.

**Thank co-sponsors and the site contacts.** It is important to keep up your public image and make sure that you acknowledged everyone who helped make the event possible. That makes it easier next time around.

**Record your efforts and their return.** Make sure you have photos taken at the events for later publicity. Notice if the media are present at the event and try to track what comes out in the news later.

**Do a final assessment when it’s all over.** Gather together those who helped with your debates and go over the protocol, decision-making and other aspects in an effort to improve your debates next time.
RESOURCES

Candidate Debates/Forums/Fairs  http://forum.lwv.org/category/member-resources/our-work/voters-service/candidate-debatesforumsfairs

Face to Face  http://lwv.org/content/face-face

FAQ’s: League Candidates Forums and Debates

Guidance for Leagues on Candidates Unwilling to Participate in Voter Education Opportunities

Guidelines for State and Local League Debates http://lwv.org/content/guidelines-state-and-local-leagues-including-%E2%80%9Cempty-chair%E2%80%9D-debates-ef-03-05

How to Use the Name and Logo on Print Materials
http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/book/how-use-name-and-logo-print-materials

LWVODC Candidates Forum Information, Rules and Format, 1/3/2013

Sample Questions for Debates and Voters’ Guides
http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/sample-questions-debates-and-voters-guides

APPENDIX MATERIALS

Sample Detail Sheet prepared by Lower Cape Fear League
Timeline/Tracking Form prepared by Lower Cape Fear League
Publicity letter for Editorial Submission and Poster prepared by Lower Cape Fear League
Criteria for Eligibility prepared by LWVNC
Script for Initial Contact prepared by Lower Cape Fear League
Candidate Invitation Letter prepared by LWVNC
Terms of Participation prepared by LWVNC
Debate Ground Rules excerpted (in entirety) from Face to Face, 2007 edition, from LWV
Sample Detail Sheet

Southport Municipal Candidates Forum – Detail Sheet 9/30/15

Tuesday, October 6, 2015
Southport Community Center – 6:30 p.m.

Candidates: Mayor – Jerry Dove and Joe Pat Hatem
Alderman – Ward 1 – Todd Coring and Marc Spenser (one seat open)
Alderman – Ward 1 unexpired – Regina White Alexander and Karen Mosteller – (one seat open)
Alderman – Ward 2 – Jwantana Frink, James Powell, Rick Pukenas, and Alex Shovlowsky (two seats open)

Co-Sponsors: League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear and Coastal Water Watch

Moderator: Carole Ellis, League of Women Voters

Time Keeper: Carolyn Pryor, LWV with help from Ann Parvin

Set-up: League members from Southern Brunswick County and Coastal Water Watch, including water for moderator and candidates.

Other assigned duties to members and co-sponsors:
Greeters for candidates and candidates to be seated alphabetically by race and
Name cards and office designation cards by each candidate - Gail, Barbara Burrell, Lora Sharkey
Show candidates how iPad works - Carolyn
Greeters for audience and hand out candidate name info, ensure no campaign literature comes in the room – Ann, Sue-Ann, and Coastal Water Watch

Introduction to the League: Sheila Fellerath, President
Introduction to the Co-sponsor and Moderator: Gail Bromley
Introduction to the Format and Candidates: Carole Ellis
Information on Voting in Elections for Alderman: Barbara Burrell

Format:
Introductions
Questions from 6:45 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. – 1 minute per question
15 minute break
Resume questions at 8:15 p.m.
Closing statements at 8:40 p.m. – 90 seconds per closing statement

Thank the candidates and the audience.
## Candidate Tracking Form for Forums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office of:</th>
<th>___________________________</th>
<th>Forum Date:</th>
<th>__________</th>
<th>Location: ___________________________</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate Name (R,D,L)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Address of Candidate</strong></td>
<td><strong>Phone #</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date Reached by Phone</strong></td>
<td><strong>E-Mail Address for Candidate or Campaign</strong></td>
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<td>Incumbent *</td>
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LWVLCF Forum Tracking Sheet
Sample of Editorial Submission to Promote Voting and Forums

Does your vote count? Yes. Does not voting count? Yes. Citizens who do not vote have abdicated their responsibility to others to decide who represents us. Too often we hear, “My vote doesn’t count anyway!” All votes count and the health of a democracy depends on each and every one of us to do our civic duty and learn about the candidates. It means registering to vote, going to the polls, and casting your vote.

September 22 is National Voter Registration Day. While it brings to light the need to register to vote, it is something you can do on almost any weekday. Registering to vote takes little time and requires you to add your name to the polls. So many in other nations would love to have that ability to vote in a democracy but they are all too often denied that right.

To vote, it is important to learn where candidates stand on the issues. Learn what you can about the candidates. Go to forums, watch or listen to debates, read about the stands candidates take on issues. To fully engage in voting, it means going to the polls to cast your vote each and every election. This year we have municipal races. Next year, it’s national and state candidates and it means voting several times with a special early primary for our presidential candidates.

The League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear, urge you to register to vote and vote. The League will be conducting voter registration drives in several locations. We will be providing candidate forums with a variety of co-sponsors. See our website for more information at www.lcflwv.org. As a non-partisan but politically active group that has been in existence nationally for 95 years, we urge everyone to be engaged in the process of voting. A democracy should not be treated as a spectator sport.

This appeared in the StarNews before Municipal Forums.
Wilmington Municipal Candidates Forum

Wednesday, October 7, 2015 at 6:30 p.m.
at the
Senior Resource Center
on South College Road

Co-Sponsored by: League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear and WECT - TV

Learn how the candidates feel about important issues facing the City of Wilmington.

Come! Send us your questions at forumquestions2015@gmail.com by October 1.
Please put “Wilmington” in the Subject line.
Statement of Eligibility

NBC17 and the League of Women Voters of North Carolina shall use the following viewpoint-neutral criteria to determine Candidate participation in the 2010 NBC17 U.S. Congressional Debate. The burden rests with the Candidate to make a showing of compliance with these criteria.

1. **Constitutional Eligibility**: The Candidate, if elected, must be legally qualified to hold the office under federal and state law.

2. **Eligibility to be on the Ballot**: The Candidate must have correctly and properly filed all documents required by the State Board of Elections in compliance with state law by Feb 26. Write-in Candidates, under normal circumstances, are not considered eligible.

3. **Evidence of a Campaign**: The Candidate has made a public announcement of an intention to run; the Candidate has a legally registered committee and has filed appropriate financial reports. The Candidate and supporters should be campaigning throughout the state. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, statewide distribution of signatures on nominating petitions, statewide distribution of volunteers and contributors, presence of a headquarters, campaign staff, issuance of position papers, and statewide campaign appearances.

4. **"Significant" Candidacy**: The Candidate must demonstrate significant voter interest and support. The following are among the factors that will be considered in determining if the Candidate has demonstrated “significance”:
   
   a. Results of major, reliable, nonpartisan, independent statewide, public opinion poll that shows a minimum level of support of ten percent (10%) at the time of selection. Possible polling sources include professional pollsters, independent newspapers, broadcasters and universities.
   
   b. Candidate is in an election to represent a political party that gathered significant (2% or more) voter support in the previous election.
   
   c. Coverage by statewide media as a recognized Candidate with district-wide support.

NBC17 and LWVNC will exercise its "good faith judgment" in applying factors to determine "significance."
Sample Script for Getting Email Addresses

Hi, my name is ___________ and I am calling on behalf of the League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear. As part of our efforts to support voter services, I am calling you as a candidate for the office of _________________. The League is partnering with _________________ for a candidates forum at the ________________ on ________________ at ___________. In order to send you a written invitation to participate in the forum, I need to get your email address. In the email, you will be asked to forward a response to us indicating your willingness to be part of the forum. The League will ensure that the forum adheres to the rules we have for equal time allotted for all candidates when it comes to receiving and answering questions that come from the public. The questions for the forum will be collected by us and our co-sponsors. We hope you will decide to join us for this event and allow your views and stands on the issues to be heard by the voting public.

Do you think you will be able to attend?

Thank you.

After the call, make sure you record the date of the successful contact and the outcome of the call. Did the candidate agree to be part of the forum when the invitation comes? This can be delegated to others in the League for starting the process.

Be consistent with everyone that you call. This will help ensure that all get the same message as much as possible. Answer questions when asked. Thank them for responding.
May 5, 2010

Tim D’Annunzio
P.O. Box 489
Raeford NC 28376

Dear Mr. D’Annunzio:

On Tuesday, June 8, at 8:00 p.m. NBC17, in association with the League of Women Voters of North Carolina (LWVNC), will broadcast a 1-hour U.S. House District 8 Candidates Debate comprising those participating in the Republican primary run-off. We invite you to participate.

Please find attached a Statement of Eligibility and Rules for Terms of Participation for you to review carefully. One copy of the Terms of Participation must be signed by you and returned to the LWVNC office no later than May 10. You may fax, attach a scanned signed copy to an email to LWVNC@bellsouth.net, or otherwise deliver this by 5 pm on the 7th. We will then send you a copy signed by NBC17 and LWVNC for your records.

The forum will be broadcast from the NBC17 studios in Raleigh. Please provide information you would like us to use in a fifteen-second introduction at the start of the forum.

LWV is a nonpartisan political organization that is well recognized and respected for its candidate forums and Voter Guides at the local, state and national levels. In North Carolina, we have local Leagues in 21 counties across the state. The NBC17 broadcast will be widely publicized through the League, NBC and its affiliates.

NBC17 will broadcast the 60-minute debate. Additionally, the forum will be available as streaming video through the NBC17 web site, http://nbc17.mync.com/site/nbc17/.

We look forward to having you join us in informing the citizens of North Carolina about the issues that are important to you, your District and the State. If you have further questions, you may leave a message for me at the LWVNC office at 919-783-5995 or e-mail me at LWVNCPresident@bellsouth.net. You may also contact Jason Clough at NBC17 at jclough@wncn.com or 919-306-6518.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Balogh, President
U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE

NBC17 and the League of Women Voters of North Carolina (LWVNC) are pleased to host a taped U.S. Congressional Debate to air statewide prior to the 2010 general election. This 60-minute debate of candidates who have met the criteria will occur on Friday, October 15, 2010 at 8:00pm and focus on issues of importance to North Carolina Voters.

The Candidate must arrive at the NBC17 studios at 1205 Front St, Raleigh, North Carolina no later than ONE HOUR before the scheduled debate unless special arrangements are made at least 48 hours in advance with NBC17.

NBC17 has used its commercially reasonable efforts to arrange and secure broadcast of the forum through its network of television stations throughout NC. NBC17 reserves the rights to rebroadcast the forum, and remains the ultimate authority concerning any changes or amendments to broadcast times and scheduling.

The Moderator of the debate will be Kim Genardo. NBC17 reserves the right to change the Moderator as necessary at its sole discretion. The Moderator will introduce the Candidates, go over the rules of the debate, direct questions to the Candidates and hold the Candidates to the allotted time. Each participating Candidate will be allotted an equal amount of time in the forum, which depends on the number of Candidates participating.

Format: Candidates will not make opening statements, and following introduction by the Moderator and an explanation of the rules, the debate will begin. Debate questions will be written by NBC17 & LWVNC staff based on suggestions for questions solicited from NBC17 viewers. Each Candidate’s closing statement will be limited to ONE MINUTE in duration.

Question Segment(s): This segment of the debate will consist of a series of questions from the Moderator to all candidates. Candidates will answer the first question in order determined by a drawing prior to the broadcast. The order for subsequent questions will rotate among the Candidates based on original order. The Moderator will ask as many questions as the allotted time allows, provided that each Candidate will receive the same number of questions. Candidates will have up to ONE MINUTE AND THIRTY SECONDS to answer. Candidates must use their time to answer the current question. All comments made by the Candidate count against the total allotted time to the Candidate for each question. The time it takes the Moderator to ask the questions will not be calculated into the Candidate’s time limit. Each Candidate will be granted 2 30-second rebuttals to use at their discretion during each of the “Question Segment(s)”.

Wild Card Segment: During a portion of the debate, there will be a wildcard segment. This segment could include either wildcard questions, lightning round questions, panelist questions or an opportunity for the Candidates to ask each other questions, at the discretion of NBC17 & LWVNC.

Reference: The Moderator will introduce the Candidate as “Mr.”, “Mrs.” or “Ms.” (as indicated by the Candidate) and by their first and last name as indicated on their official statement of candidacy submitted to the N.C. State Board of Elections, and there after by “Mr.”, “Mrs.” or “Ms.” and their last name. All graphics will identify the Candidate by their first name and last name.
Moderator: The Moderator shall have the discretion to adjust the time allotted to each question, answer, response, reply and closing statement as may be reasonably necessary, in his or her judgment, to conclude any specific phase of the forum in a timely manner. Any such adjustment will apply to all Candidates equally.

Time Notification: Candidates will be advised TEN SECONDS before the expiration of their time, and the advisory shall be given by means not readily apparent to the television audience. The Moderator may interrupt a Candidate to terminate a Candidate’s reply, answer, or closing statement if the Candidate does not conclude by the end of the allotted time.

Prohibitions: The Candidates will bring no notes or props onto the set. Cell phones, pagers and cameras are prohibited during the debate. No campaign materials will be permitted on NBC17 property, nor shall any demonstration by a Candidate’s supporters or opponents be permitted.

Copyrights/Ownership: NBC17 will have exclusive ownership of all copyrights and property rights of every kind whatsoever in and of the debate including radio, television, cable TV, web, video & audio recordings, or filming of the debate. NBC17 & LWVNC shall not authorize any portion of the audio or video broadcast of the forum to be used by any person or group (including the Candidates) for political advertising. Links to the forum may be publicized by LWVNC and others.

The Candidates will make themselves available in the broadcast studio as requested during the hour before the start of the debate. No persons other than the Candidates, Moderator, and broadcast production personnel will be allowed in the broadcast studio during the forum.

Hair & Makeup: Each Candidate is responsible for their own hair and make-up.

Discrepancies: Matters concerning how the forum will be conducted and broadcast which may arise prior to the commencement of the forum, but which have not been covered by this document, are subject to agreement by the Candidates, NBC17 and the League of Women Voters of North Carolina, except any such matter arising within 8 hours preceding the commencement of the debate which shall be subject to determination solely by NBC17 and the League of Women Voters. Matters that arise while the forum is in progress, but which have not been covered by this document, are subject to determination by the Moderator of the forum.

These TERMS FOR PARTICIPATION are offered, agreed to, and executed on this ____th day of ___________ 2010.

By: ______________________    By: ____________    By: _______________________
Bradley Moses        Kathleen Balogh        Candidate
General Manager, NBC-17  President, League of Women Voters
EXAMPLES OF GROUNDRULES from *Face to Face*, 2007, pp 26-7

These are examples of debate details that should be resolved before the debate occurs: There will be no substitutes or stand-ins for the candidates.

All news releases about the debate will be handled by the sponsoring organization and sent simultaneously to all the candidates. Confidentiality of the debate negotiations will be maintained by the candidates and by the sponsor.

Each candidate will have access to the site several hours before the debate to check on the lighting, acoustics and set design.

No campaign banners, signs, literature handouts or other campaign paraphernalia will be allowed in the debate hall.

The audience will be asked to refrain from applauding or in other ways demonstrating support or nonsupport for a candidate.

There will be no audience reaction shots during the debate, although panning of the audience before and after the debate may be allowed.

The moderator will introduce the candidates using a 15-second introduction provided by the candidates. Candidates will be introduced by title. Thereafter, "Mr." and "Ms." will be used. The winner of a coin toss on the day of the debate will have first choice of podium position. The candidates will remain behind the podiums at all times during the debate. Stools will be provided. A pitcher of water and a glass will be on a shelf in each podium.

The candidates will bring no notes or props. Each candidate will be provided with a legal pad and pens for taking notes during the debate.

There will be a coin toss to determine candidates' order of taking the first question and making closing statements.

Time limits on responses will be strictly observed. A timekeeper will hold cards, visible to the speaker, indicating how much time remains. When the "stop card" is shown, the speaker must end his/her speech within 10 seconds.

The moderator will have the responsibility for enforcing time limits. The moderator also will have the authority to interrupt the proceedings to enforce the ground rules and format that were agreed to by the candidates.

The moderator may restate the question.

The panelists and moderator may interrupt the candidates if they believe the candidates are straying from the subject.

The candidates will not interrupt one another.

The candidates' closing statements should be significantly related to the matters debated previously. Because there is no opportunity for rebuttal following the closing statements, candidates should refrain from personal attacks or charges.

No flash cameras and no motor driven cameras will be used during the debate.

Photographers and the press will be placed at a reasonable distance from the candidates and microphones to reduce distractions.

A press area will be provided near the entrance to the debate for arrival and departure photographs of the candidates and interviews after the debate if the candidates wish to speak to the press.

Candidates are invited to remain for a reception and a news media availability following the debate.