THE ROAD TO THE VOTING BOOTH
Part II

A Handbook for Candidate Events
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INTRODUCTION

Voter Service has made the League of Women Voters the foremost nonpartisan volunteer organization in the political arena today; Voter Service brings the League visibility; Voter Service is the heart of the League.

This handbook is designed to help League Boards and Voter Service Directors plan and conduct effective, fair and interesting candidate events. It contains practical information, suggestions and advice to help you with your efforts to educate and inform the electorate about the issues, about the candidates, about the political process; this is our mission.

First, a word about terminology. There are many forms and formats for Candidates Events, many of which are described and discussed later in this guide. No matter what format is used, the rules, policies, suggestions and procedures outlined apply to all. In other words, the format and title used for the gathering do not change the basic principles which should be applied to all meetings at which the League invites candidates to meet the voters.

Voter Service activities must always protect the nonpartisanship of the League. Candidates and political parties are never supported or opposed. Voter Service activities present only the facts on issues so that citizens can make their own decisions. Our well deserved reputation for fairness depends on a careful safeguarding of this! *** IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT WHILE PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT ANY CANDIDATE EVENTS, LEAGUES MAKE CERTAIN THAT THEY WILL BE PERCEIVED AS BEING NON PARTISAN.

HAVE A GREAT EVENT!
CANDIDATE EVENTS ESSENTIALS

EACH AND EVERY CANDIDATE EVENT, NO MATTER WHAT IT IS NAMED, MUST ABIDE BY WRITTEN POLICY

1. Develop a comprehensive written Candidate Event policy reviewed annually by the Board that includes:
   • Non partisan statement.
   • Prohibition against empty chair debates (LWVNY adopted policy July 2017).
   • Recording policy.
   • Criteria for Candidate inclusion (LWVNY recommends only including candidates on ballot).
   • Policy on distribution of campaign literature.

2. Send Candidate Event Policy to candidates with invitation to event.
   • Obtain acknowledgement of receipt of policy signed by candidate and campaign manager.

3. If sponsoring a primary candidate event, you MUST OFFER to sponsor a candidate event for any other party holding a primary for same race (LWVNY adopted policy July 2017)

4. Careful planning and preparation is crucial with defined roles for board and committee.
   o Entire Board of Directors decides if candidate events should be held, and if so, which ones, and establishes parameters.
   o Local League is responsible for maintaining control of candidate events from inception.
   o Voter Service Chair assembles committee, designates roles, and oversees the entire event.
     o Voter Service Committee
       ▪ Plans event including site selection, date and time (make sure not on religious holiday).
       ▪ Selects format including who and how questions will be asked, time to respond and whether rebuttals will be allowed.
       ▪ Sends invitations and follow up correspondence (always including policy statement)
         • Use press and social media to pressure candidates who are not responding to invitation
       ▪ Selects a trained moderator who can be fair and neutral, can maintain control night of event and, whenever possible, does not live in Election District relevant to the event.
         o Moderator is in charge night of event.
           ▪ Moderator needs to know the format, ground rules, candidates, and any “hot issues.”
           ▪ Moderator (or League president) conveys rules to the audience.
     o Candidate Event Team roles include time keeper, vetters, floor manager, and greeters.

IMPORTANT THAT LEAGUE IS NOT ONLY NON PARTISAN BUT PERCEIVED THAT WAY
Publicity should include non partisan statement and policy on empty chair.
Display signage with non partisan statement the evening of event,
If event is cancelled because of no empty chair, publicize reason.
Follow written policy carefully
LWVNYS POLICIES ON CANDIDATE EVENTS

LWVNYS Policy on Open or Empty Chairs in Candidate Events
It is extremely important that all Leagues throughout New York state speak with one voice, have clear and consistent policies, and adhere to our nonpartisan policy. Therefore "open or empty" chair candidate meetings will not be allowed at any level of League for any elected position. Any League sponsored public event that invites a candidate for elected office will be considered a candidate meeting. A candidate meeting with only one candidate physically present is an "open or empty" chair candidate meeting. (Adopted by State Board July 2017)

LWVNYS Policy on Candidate Events for Primaries
Any league holding a candidate meeting for a party primary for elected office, must offer to hold a candidate meeting for any party that has a primary for that elected office. This will ensure that the League is not perceived as supporting or opposing a party. (Adopted by State Board July 2017)

LWVNYS Policy on Recording/Taping
Only those individuals specifically authorized by the Leagues may record or videotape a candidate event. The League of Women Voters owns the content of the candidate event and may post recordings of it in its entirety on League media. Any use of the authorized recording requires the advance approval of the League of Women Voters, except that other local Leagues may post the recording on their websites. Only licensed media, including TV, radio and newspapers are entitled to air portions of this recording, in keeping with Federal Communication Commission (FCC) regulations. No one is permitted to edit footage for campaign or other purposes.

This recording/taping policy includes live streaming. If a candidate event is being live streamed, the League owns and must maintain control of the live stream. If it is being archived, it must be shown in its entirety. (Adopted by State Board August 2018)
WHY CANDIDATE EVENTS?

Candidate events have been around almost as long as the League of Women Voters. In 1924, a small booklet published by LWVUS, suggested that we:

“hold pre-election meetings and invite all candidates to speak;

collect and give out nonpartisan information on candidates and issues;

conduct candidate meetings as a service to the voters because it gives them a means of forming a first-hand judgment of the candidates, and as a service to the candidates because it gives them an opportunity to present their views to audiences of varied political affiliation.”

The directive and the reasoning have not changed through the years. Hundreds of League candidate events are held each year. They are considered special events in the election calendar and for very good reasons. League Candidate Events are fair; they are unbiased; they are competently run. They are conducted for informational purposes, without a hidden agenda, and are controlled by principles of nonpartisanship.

Many Leagues offer to provide moderators and to assist in the planning of candidate meetings run by other organizations. These other organizations frequently hold candidate meetings which are not necessarily open to candidates of all parties nor conducted under strictly nonpartisan guidelines. Cooperation with other organization is encouraged, so long as the other organization agrees to adhere to your local leagues’ written Candidate Events policy. A fee can justifiably be requested for these services, as the League will draw on its considerable expertise to conduct a fair, well-run meeting for the organization.
OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL LEAGUES TO HOLD CANDIDATE EVENTS

Local Leagues may choose to offer or collaborate in offering candidate events whenever there is a contested election at its level of government. Candidate events at other levels of government are governed by the following guidelines.

- The LWVUS is responsible for candidate events for national office.
- The LWVNYS is responsible for candidate events for statewide office.
- An Inter League Organization (ILO) or a group of Leagues may choose to hold a single candidate event for candidates whom they share - those running for the U.S. House of Representatives, the state legislature or county government. Sometimes candidates prefer to take part in several events sponsored by local Leagues, rather than a single shared event. Communication among Leagues and between different levels of Leagues is essential to facilitate scheduling and to avoid conflicts where sharing candidates exists.

Candidate events may be held by Local Leagues for the following elections:
- Federal, state, county, city, town or village general elections
- Federal, state, county, city, town or village primary elections
- Special elections to fill vacancies between regular elections
- Elections run by providers of local government services, such as fire or improvement districts
- School board elections
- Community elections, such as housing authorities or tenant committees.
- Judicial elections.

In conjunction with its responsibility to hold candidate events for statewide office, LWVNYS reserves the exclusive right to contact the candidates for statewide office for the purpose of securing their participation in candidate forums, debates and other voter service activities. In its discretion, the LWVNYS may agree to contact candidates for a statewide office for a local League's event, or delegate the right to contact the candidates to the local League. Local Leagues are not to contact statewide candidates directly or organize a statewide candidate event without the permission of LWVNYS.

Procedures For Hosting A Candidate Event For Federal Office
Before a local can organize or hold a Candidate Event for federal office, the local must contact the state office so that such events can be coordinated among the locals within the election district. Once the state office has been consulted, the local must comply with the rules for federal election events. These events are governed by the FCC, FEC and IRS laws and regulations which LWVNYS has now applied to races at all levels in NYS. See policies on page 3 above.
CANDIDATE EVENT FORMATS and SETTINGS

A critical factor to the success of any Candidate Event is the format that is employed. There is no single correct format; the number of candidates, local issues, the chosen setting and the candidates themselves can often influence the final choice of the format. A good format can make the difference between an informative, interesting Candidate Event and one that is dull and obscures the candidates’ differences on the issues. The format may also ensure that a candidate event truly offers equal opportunities for the candidates to present their positions. With any format, statements and responses to questions should alternate among candidates; questions should avoid duplications; each question should be answered and answerable by each candidate who wishes to speak. Above all, issues, not personalities, should be addressed.

There are many forms of candidate events. Several of the possibilities are described below. The one most often used by local leagues is the “formal” format, which is often called a “Debate,” “Candidate Forum,” or a “Meet the Candidates Night.”

**Formal:** This format presents opening statements by all candidates with the order of speaking determined by drawing lots and closing statements in reverse order from the opening statements. Audience questions can be made in person at the mike or can be written on cards distributed when the audience members enter the debate area. Written questions can be given directly to the moderator or screened by League members to avoid unanswerable, illegible or duplicate questions. If the technical equipment is available, questions may be phoned in by the at-home listeners/viewers. All statements, responses and questions are timed.

**Panels:** This format involves having a panel of questioners. It was once thought that experienced news reporters could best ferret out information from the candidates, but now many panels are made up of a diverse group representing different media, different viewpoints and different backgrounds. In this format all candidates have an opportunity to answer all questions and follow-up questions may be asked. Responses are subject to time limits. The panel consists of from three to five questioners. If a panel comprised of community groups or co-sponsors is used, the Voter Service Committee should take part in editing and coordinating the questions to assure nonpartisanship and diversity. Opening statements can be omitted but closing statements should be included. This format does not include questions from the audience. A more experienced moderator may be needed for this format than for formal debates, especially if follow-up questions are asked or if the candidates are allowed rebuttal time.

**Cumulative Time:** This format promotes interchange among candidates, allows them to hold each other accountable, and keeps voter interest while enabling them to see the differences among the candidates. This format requires particularly experienced moderators and timers. The procedure is more fully described in Appendix A (page 20).

**Cross Questioning:** In this format the candidates ask each other questions and the moderator acts as a referee, enforcing rules and keeping the debate on track. This format works best as one segment of a mixed format debate. Since the candidates control the agenda, they can avoid bringing up issues of substance and allow the debate to focus on personalities. On the other hand, this format allows the audience to evaluate the candidates by the questions they ask as well as their answers. The questions and answers should be subject to time limits.
In addition to the formal debate structures described above, there are other formats which can be used.

**Candidate Introduction Nights:** This format involves inviting all candidates to make a statement about their backgrounds, qualifications, positions etc. Each is allotted a specific time to make the presentation. No questions are asked and no interchange among the candidates takes place.

**Candidate Fairs:** When there are too many candidates to hold a debate, a fair might be used. Candidates have a table or booth in a central location such as a gymnasium, shopping mall or city park where they can display and distribute campaign literature. The audience circulates; the candidates do not.

**Shared Questions:** Another solution when there are too many candidates to hold a conventional debate is to seat the candidates in the order in which they will appear on the ballot and ask for a response to the first question, asked by the moderator, from the first three candidates; a response to the next question by the next three candidates etc. The first responder to each question changes to avoid having the same candidate answering first. This also serves to change the composition of the groups. Responses are timed but candidates may respond to earlier questions if they have time left and can also respond to earlier questions in their closing statements. The moderator will need to use a grid to keep track of the order for responses. Opening statements are usually omitted in this format.

**PROCESS FOR ORGANIZING CANDIDATE EVENTS**

**WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE LEAGUE BOARD?**

*To Establish Policies Regarding Conduct of Candidate Events*
Candidate Events are the responsibility of the entire local League board, and policies governing them should not be made by the Voter Service chair or committee in isolation. The entire board is responsible for the success of the candidate event and should be active in the planning and oversight of the event. It is crucial that the LWV maintains control of the event from the inception. The chair recommends, but the board makes the final decisions. Attendance of all board members at all candidate events is to be strongly encouraged.

In addition to the Non-Partisan Policy, policies governing the following should be in **WRITING** and reviewed annually. Leagues should consult LWVUS and LWVNY published policies and advisements regarding the following aspects of the Candidate Event.

1. Policy for candidate eligibility for participation in candidate events
2. Significant candidate criteria
3. Policy prohibiting empty-chair debates
4. Policy for candidates who cannot appear (substitutes, read statements...)
5. Policy for recording of candidate events.
6. Criteria for cancelling the event.
7. What campaign literature, if any, will be allowed at the candidate event?

To Develop Criteria for Candidate Significance and Inclusion in Events:
In most cases, all candidates certified by the Board of Elections seeking the same office are invited to participate, both from recognized parties and independent candidates.
***WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT NO WRITE-IN CANDIDATES ARE ALLOWED TO PARTICIPATE. AN EASY WAY TO DETERMINE WHO CAN PARTICPATE IS BY ONLY INCLUDING THOSE CANDIDATES WHO ARE CERTIFIED ON THE OFFICIAL BALLOT.

To Determine which, if any, Candidate Events will be held in an election cycle.
Several months before an election, the Board should consider and decide whether the League will hold one or more candidate events for a particular race or races. Among the criteria for making this decision are:
1. Will such an event serve League goals of informing the voter about the candidates and the issues?
2. Will the event enhance League visibility in the community and attract an audience?
3. Does the League have the people power and other resources to carry it off?
4. Are the political parties likely to cooperate?

To Establish Parameters of the Candidate Event to be held
Once it has been decided to proceed with a candidate event, the following issues should be addressed:

1. What offices should be included?
2. Should the League invite co-sponsors?
3. What media outlets should be contacted—TV or radio broadcaster, press coverage, web-based outlet?

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMMITTEE?

Role of the Chair and the Committee
The chair is the individual designated by the board to be responsible for all aspects of the candidate event. This is the one person who will be the face of the League, and who will interact with all other actors in connection with the event, and therefore must project a positive, nonpartisan image of the League.

The chair implements the criteria and decisions made by the board. She/he relates to the board the decisions of the committee and requests board approval when appropriate.

The chair assembles a committee which will, under her/his leadership, create a calendar, outline other areas of responsibility, assign those responsibilities to committee and/or board members and oversee the event to its successful conclusion.

Preliminary Planning
Site Selection and Facilities - the event should be centrally located, accessible to all, with
adequate public parking and/or access to public transportation available. Site selection should include consideration of possible costs, e.g. rental of an auditorium; rental of sound and audio-visual equipment; rental of chairs, tables, and custodial services. Any expenses should be estimated early in the planning and brought to the board in a formal budget, before the commitment for a space is made.

Some organizations require CERTIFICATES OF INSURANCE from all organizations using their facilities. The LWVNYS carries insurance which covers each local League; contact the LWVNYS office well in advance of your event to discuss insurance needs.

Contracting for the event site may require signing a formal agreement with liability potential. Any such contract should be reviewed and, approved by the board and signed by the president.

If possible, select a site that has
- adequate size and configuration to allow the audience to see, hear and participate;
- a raised platform, without barriers which separate the audience from the speakers;
- a background suitable for TV cameras and for display of the LWV banner.

The physical arrangement of the platform will depend on the number of candidates and the format, however in all situations there should be a draped table, with printed name cards readable by audiences and TV viewers; lighting suitable for TV production; microphones for speakers and, if necessary, floor mikes for audience participation (These must be checked just before the event to assure their adequacy for TV and auditorium needs. Decide if ushers are needed to control floor mikes during the question period); adequate accommodations to assure eye-contact between candidates, moderator and timekeepers;

Among the supplies needed are:
For participants: adequate water pitchers, glasses, pads and pencils
For timekeepers: stopwatches, time cards and reserved front row seats.

Arrangements: Date/Time
Select potential event dates close enough to the election to generate interest but with enough lead time to allow coverage in the local papers and multiple rebroadcasts of the event on TV.

Know election law deadlines and check with your local county Board of Elections on the date when candidates are certified to assure the inclusion of all candidates.

Check the calendars of candidates, political parties, community organizations, school, legal holidays and major sporting events (e.g. play-offs, World Series) to avoid conflicts. PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE DATES OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS. Plan the most suitable day of the week, hour and length of the forum.

Working backwards from the date that is finally selected for the event, the committee should devise a time-line including the deadlines for completion of each phase of the project. The chair is responsible for the progress at each critical date.
Inform all involved of their roles and responsibilities, in writing where necessary. Coordinate potential event dates with other Leagues sharing the candidates, discuss cosponsorship, planning and division of responsibilities.

Prepare a display of League publications and membership information.

**Planning the Event**

- Select a moderator.
- If display of campaign literature is permitted under the Board policy, establish appropriate format, ground rules and policy for displaying campaign literature.
- Formulate questions to ask the candidates.
- If you are setting up an event before the official ballot is set, you can send a “Save the Date” communication to all potential candidates informing them of the proposed date and time of the event and including a copy of the written policy on Candidates Events.
- Invite the candidates. Only those candidates who meet the criteria for inclusion (i.e. inclusion on the official ballot) should receive an invitation to the event. If the initial contact is by telephone, a confirmation letter should be sent reviewing the contents of the telephone conversation. Otherwise the first letter to the candidates can be exploratory. The initial letter of invitation should contain basic information about the debate and the local’s written Candidates Events policy. Once you have obtained the candidates written commitment to appear, you can apprise them in writing of the format, ground rules, board policies and the chosen moderator.
- Collect information on all candidates and make it available to the moderator.

**Guidelines for Questions for Candidate Events**

If the format will include a series of questions to be asked by the moderator or by a panel, consider the following guidelines:

1. Questions must be clear, concise and appropriate to the office being sought by the candidates.
2. Questions must be appropriate to all candidates seeking the same office. Keep in mind that an incumbent has more information on some issues than the other candidates and can probably provide more informed answers.
3. Questions should reflect the issues of greatest interest to the entire community and cover a broad range of topics.
4. Word questions so that they can not be answered by “yes” or “no.”
5. Word questions in a manner that will elicit the political philosophy of each candidate.
6. Questions must not include or imply personal attacks on any candidate.

League program directors may be requested to help formulate questions.

**Establish Candidate Event Ground Rules**

Ground rules define the limits of the event and the specifics within the chosen forum. If possible, ground rules should be planned with the selected moderator before they are communicated to the candidates and parties. Experienced moderators have more expertise in handling problem
situations than either the candidates or the Voter Service Committee and can make cogent suggestions.

Among the issues which should be addressed in advance of the candidate event are:

1. Should the president of the LWV (or of a co-sponsoring organization) or the Voter Service Chair open the event?
2. Will League announcements be made before the Event begins?
3. Will there be opening statements by the candidates or will the event begin with a prepared question?
4. Will questions from the floor be made from floor mikes? If so, will ushers be needed to control the microphones? Has the TV cable crew been consulted about the logistics of wiring, traffic flow, etc.? Will the moderator know how to time the final question, despite the line of questioners at the microphones?
5. Will questions from the audience be made in writing? If so, how and when will the question cards be distributed? collected? screened? given to the moderator?
6. Will questions be received by phone from an at-home audience? If so, who will receive the calls? Who will screen them? Who will relay them to the moderator? Without a live audience or a very small one, this format can be handled more easily in a studio setting rather than in a large auditorium. The studio’s technical crew may be accustomed to the phone-in programming and may have developed workable procedures. Under any circumstances, there should be a mechanism for screening calls rather than putting them directly on the air. This procedure necessitates planning and co-ordination between the moderator and the TV personnel.
7. How long should the event run and what is the time of each segment? Realistic timing of the question period is essential. With multiple candidates, it is important to determine exactly how many responses are possible within the allotted question period.
8. Should there be rebuttals by each candidate to the statements of other candidates or should rebuttals be contained in the closing statements? When there are multiple candidates, rebuttals take a considerable amount of time and limit the number of questions that can be asked. Candidates usually would prefer to answer as many questions as possible and work their rebuttals into answers to subsequent responses or include them in their closing statements.
9. One method of handling rebuttals is by use of a “red card”. Each candidate is provided with a red cardboard, large enough to be easily seen by the moderator, and each candidate is given the opportunity, by raising the card, to speak out of turn in rebuttal to a response from the other candidate. The number of times in which each candidate can use the red card and the length of time of each rebuttal varies based on the number of candidates and projected running time of the debate; this is decided before hand and is communicated to the candidates in advance of the event.
10. Will the moderator be able to change the amount of time allowed each candidate to answer audience questions after the forum has begun? This is often necessary when time is limited and the audience is interested in continuing. Candidates should be informed ahead of time that the moderator has this discretionary option and the audience should be informed of this possibility before the commencement of the candidate event. It may also be possible to extend the length of the event if the candidates, TV, custodians on site and the audience agree, but this contingency should be worked out ahead of time.
11. League policy on the display or contribution of campaign literature, buttons within the event space should be clearly spelled out and relayed ahead of time to the candidates, party workers and League members who will assist at the forum. Certain venues, such as public libraries may have their own policies on this which must be complied with. If the League policy permits display of campaign literature, a sign should be posted in the area in which the literature is displayed which sets out the nonpartisanship of the League. Such a sign could say:

_The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization._
_Candidates and political parties are never supported or opposed._

**Media Involvement**

The committee should coordinate with the Publicity chair who will assume responsibility for print, radio and TV coverage.

Where required, contracts with radio and TV stations should be reviewed by and approved by the board and signed by the president.

League policy requires that candidate events be rebroadcast in their entirety. This requirement should be discussed with the media outlets early in the planning process.

It is important to invite media reporters to Candidates Events and provide front row seating.

**Conducting the Candidate Event**

The president represents the League and may open the event. If there are co-sponsors, an equal role should be given to the presidents of each co-sponsoring organization. The banner or logo of each group should be visible to the audience and the TV audience.

The moderator is in charge of the event once she/he is introduced.

**Post event**

The committee chair should send letters of thanks to each candidate, the political parties, co-sponsors, the moderator, each committee member and others responsible for the success of the event.

A written evaluation should be made by the committee and the board to assist in future planning.

The chair’s report, including copies of candidate letters, contracts, PR clippings, financial report, evaluation etc. should be completed and filed.

**WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR?**

Once an event is in progress, the moderator is in charge and maintains control from start to finish. The moderator must demonstrate absolute fairness, neutrality and dignity. Because s/he represents the nonpartisan standards of the League, it is important that the moderator be absolutely independent of the local political situation. Therefore, whenever possible, a moderator should be
from outside of the immediate community and election district(s) relevant to the forum. **If a moderator does live in the election district, this should be acknowledged in a statement in beginning of the event as well as a statement saying the moderator will be fair and impartial.**

The moderator should be aware of policy decisions made by the board that impact on the event; be prepared to work within the format, ground rules and site arrangements selected by the committee; be trained in moderating techniques and flexible in making adjustments during the event.

**Assistance from the Committee**
The moderator should expect that the Committee has provided certain information prior to the event:

1. Details about the arrangements: the date, hour, duration of the event, TV coverage, exact location of the event, driving directions and parking availability.
2. Information about the candidates, their biographies and local newspaper publicity.
3. Information about the expected audience, the size, usual behavior, an accurate appraisal of the temper of the race, “hot issues” and community factions.
4. Copies of League publicity, flyers, invitation letters. The moderator should request these items when moderating for organizations other that the League.

**Preparation for the Candidate Event**
While the committee works on the details of the event, the moderator’s job is to become familiar with the situation s/he will be dealing with at the event. Once the format has been confirmed the Moderator should:

**PREPARE A SCRIPT** to free the moderator from stress at the event. The framework of the script is the format which the moderator and the committee have worked on and to which the candidates have agreed. It will be divided into sections, dictated by the format but usually includes:

Welcome by the League president or leader of the sponsoring group. The welcoming remarks should include a statement of the League’s nonpartisan policy, stress that the moderator is not a stake holder in the election and introduce the moderator and timekeeper(s). The following preliminary remarks can be delivered by the League president or the moderator.

- Introduction of the candidates.
- Explanation of the event’s format and ground rules.
- If questions will be submitted in writing by members of the audience, the audience should be advised that similar questions may be combined by the moderator, that questions must be answerable by all candidates.
- Review the policy about taping or videotaping of the event.
- Introduction of part one: opening statements or opening questions.
- Introduction of subsequent parts of the forum, including pertinent ground rules.
- Closing statements of the candidates.
- Closure of the event, including a reminder of the date, time and place(s) of the election. The time and date of TV re-runs can also be announced.
Rehearse the script so it comes naturally, with words with which the moderator is comfortable. It should become so familiar that the moderator may use it only as a reference at the forum.

Prepare for the question period with a system for varying the order in which candidates speak or answer. It is important that you use some type of record so you are aware at a glance of the sequence of answers. Some moderators use the grid contained in the Toolkit and also keep track of the subject of the questions asked in the grid to give the sponsoring organization a record of the topics covered.

If the format calls for written questions, the moderator should recommend the use of distinctive cards to be given out at the door. This prevents any faction from coming to the forum with questions already formulated.

Some suggestions for responses for situations which might occur in the course of a candidate event are set out in “What If...” below and on a power point entitled “Moderating Candidates Debates” on the LWVNYS website.

Before the event begins:
1. Visit the site to be familiar with the best way to get there in the dark.
2. Arrive early, with all papers in order. Prepare lots for the candidates to draw to determine the order for answering questions and for opening and closing statements.
3. Have the agenda, seating chart, pen and the gavel from the local League or sponsoring organization.
4. Welcome the candidates and help put them at ease. Most of them are more nervous than you will ever be. They are really on the line and for many, this is a first time experience.
5. Prior to the event, call the candidates together to draw lots, go over the ground rules and ask for proper pronunciation of names.
6. If there are candidates who have problems speaking English, are very young or obviously nervous, be extra gracious to them. Give them time to find the right word. Don’t jump in and hurry them.

Be very clear about the rebuttal process or the crosstalk process. Let everyone know that you are in charge once the event starts.

Be sure you know what the League’s (or sponsoring organization’s) policy is in regard to audio or video taping of the event by unauthorized persons and announce this at the beginning of the event. This will avoid misunderstandings and prevent partisan use of debate material.

Some words of wisdom: It may be helpful to bear in mind that:

- A candidate event is a human institution and as such is imperfect. Who is better suited to do the job properly than the League of Women Voters? And how can the League do it without hardy souls like you?
- Careful preparation is the best insurance against the unexpected (and there usually is something you didn’t quite expect).
- A sense of humor is often your best weapon in dealing with the swirling political passions of the moment.
• Above all, be gracious and pleasant no matter what you personally think about the candidates. You will earn the respect of all if they perceive that you are FAIR AND FIRM.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TEAM DURING THE CANDIDATE EVENT?

Other members of the committee who have active roles during the Candidate Event.

1. **Floor Manager.** This is the person who arrives early at the venue to check the mike(s), chair height, lights, and fire exits. Make sure that security is available. Ask for water and glasses if they have not been provided. Be sure there are name cards visible to the TV cameras and the audience.

2. **Greeters** are stationed at the entrance to the venue to welcome members of the public, disseminate League material, enforce the League policy about campaign literature, prevent members of the audience from entering the venue with placards or other material which might be distracting from the forum.

3. **Vetters** review the written questions from the audience to ensure that the handwriting is legible, the question is acceptable and not personal or slanderous, and to group questions in categories to avoid repetition. If the audience is asked to come to the floor microphone, a League member should be in charge of the mike.

4. The number of **timers** needed/used will vary with the format of the candidate event. The timers should be provided with chairs in the very front of the venue, with good sight distances from the candidates to the timers.

5. Other committee members should be assigned to roam the audience for several purposes: to disseminate and collect cards with questions, to deal with obstreperous audience members, and to seat latecomers.

If TV coverage is provided, the camera crew can be your best friends; cultivate them. Ask if they will need to change tapes at some point in the event and how they will inform you. Announce the process to the audience before the event begins.

Candidate Events should be informative and fun! They should serve the public, providing as much information as the candidates will give, in as nonpartisan environment as the League can create.
SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH SITUATIONS WHICH COMMONLY ARISE DURING CANDIDATES EVENTS

WHAT IF....

...a candidate keeps going when his/her time is up?
   Interrupt gently, but firmly. “Excuse me, Mr. Candidate, but you have used up your time.” You can let people finish their sentences, but some people’s sentences never end. If you permit one candidate to go over his/her time, the others will never let you forget it.

...a candidate gets obstreperous or unruly?
   Address him/her directly. “Ms. Candidate, you are out of order.” “Mr. Candidate. I must remind you once again that you are not being fair to the other candidates.” If your admonitions don’t work, console yourself with the thought that the evening is accomplishing its purpose: revealing the candidate’s true character!

...a member of the audience is rowdy?
   Address him/her directly. “Sir, please sit down and wait your turn.” or “Please respect the rules we have established so that we may have an orderly discussion of the issues.” Usually, your comments and growing peer pressure from the audience will do the trick. If it doesn’t, call a brief recess and speak to the rabble rouser yourself. (There have even been occasions, fortunately rare, when a member of the audience was drunk and disorderly and the police had to be summoned.)

...the audience gets unruly?
   Remind the audience that this is not a rally for voters who have already made up their minds, but a nonpartisan event for those who have not. You can use such comments as: “We understand that many of you have strong feelings about this election (issue), but others have come here tonight to help them decide how to vote. Please let us use our time for discussion of the issues.” or “Please, let’s not waste time that should be spent discussing the issues.”
   Remember that you have the authority to call a recess to review the ground rules with the co-sponsors and participants. You even have the authority to decide that conditions just do not exist for a useful discussion of the issues and so to adjourn the event.

...there is a challenge to your authority and the way you are conducting the event?
   Calmly restate the ground rules and proceed. (You can even read from the letter of invitation). If the challenge continues, you can call a recess and caucus with the candidates and sponsors. With careful preparation this shouldn’t happen.
...a “question” to a candidate is really a personal attack?
Rule the question out of order, explaining that we are here for an open, orderly exchange on the issues, not character assassination. Ask for another question.

...a question is really a statement?
Interrupt. “Please phrase your statement as a question.” Some moderators time the questions as well as the answers.

...all the questions are on the same subject?
Ask the audience for questions on other topics. “We have had many questions on this topic. Are there members of the audience who wish to question the candidates about other issues?” When the questions are submitted in writing, you and the question sorter can consolidate some of them: “Here we have three questions on the same topic.” Better not try to rephrase questions, though. Questioners have great pride of authorship.

...the audience is very small?
Consider rearranging the chairs in a more informal setting and perhaps adopting a more conversational format. Give the candidates more time to answer questions.

...you run out of questions?
Adjourn. Sometimes the audience is small or the race lacks hot issues. Just move ahead to the closing statements and send the grateful audience home to bed.

...people demand to see the written questions afterwards?
Refuse them. This has caused great trouble in the past. One campaign worker called an unanswered question into a newspaper after the event and they were published (inaccurately) in the next edition. Questioner’s handwriting may be recognized and their privacy invaded. So, keep the questions yourself, show them to no one and destroy them after the event.

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LAWS, REGULATIONS, LEAGUE GUIDELINES AND POLICIES IMPACTING CANDIDATES EVENTS

Candidate events, particularly events for federal offices are impacted by a wide range of federal laws and regulations of the Federal Elections Board, the Federal Communications Commission and the Internal Revenue Service. LWVUS and LWVNY policies and guidelines are in place which serve to ensure that local Leagues stay within the boundaries of these laws and foster the standard of non-partisanship which is essential to the Leagues continued influence and reputation.

The LWVNY policies are on page 3 above.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING JUDICIAL EVENTS

The rules governing the conduct of judicial candidates are more rigid than for others running for political office. The NYS Code of Judicial Conduct prohibits a judicial candidate from making "pledges or promises" of future conduct or decision making other than the faithful and impartial performance of the duties of the office.

The moderator of a judicial candidate event should inform the audience that there are restrictions on the topics that these candidates may discuss and request that candidates not be pressured when they cannot answer a specific question. It is advisable to have questions from the audience submitted in writing for screening. If possible, it is very helpful to have an attorney present to screen audience questions. This procedure could prevent awkward situations during question/answer sessions.

Questions to judicial candidates should be limited to their qualifications, experience and philosophy. Examples of suitable questions are:

1. What are your professional qualifications for election to this office?
2. What is your past experience? Has it included civil/criminal law?
3. How would you balance the need for judicial independence with the need to raise campaign funds? Would you, for example, accept contributions from attorneys who may appear before you?
4. How would you improve the administration of the judicial system? What measures would you suggest to reduce court congestion and delays? [for administrative judges only]
5. What changes would you suggest to improve the jury system?
6. Do you feel the current public defender system in New York State affords the indigent with competent defense? Why?
7. Do/would you use alternatives to incarceration? Do you feel there are sufficient alternative programs available in this community?

Candidates for Family Court judgements might be asked:
1. Do you feel Family Court is adequately funded?
2. Is there sufficient support personnel?
RESOURCES

WEB SITES:

www.lwv.org
National League of Women Voters

www.lwvny.org
New York State League of Women Voters

www.elections.state.ny.us
NYS Election Law, political calendar etc.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan volunteer organization working to promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. It does support or oppose legislation after serious study and substantial agreement among its members. This publication is published by the Foundation for Citizen Education, League of Women Voters of New York State.
APPENDIX A

GUIDELINES FOR HOLDING CUMULATIVE TIME
CANDIDATE EVENTS

At a Cumulative Time Candidate Event, candidates are told how much cumulative time they have for the entire question period at the beginning of the debate by the moderator and are timed by their own timekeeper. Each candidate is kept aware of how much time s/he has used during the course of the debate and how his/her time usage compares with that of the other candidates.

The forum begins with a question asked by the moderator, which all candidates answer. (Additional questions can be asked by the moderator or by members of the audience.) When all have responded to the question they can use some of their time to rebut, add to their original answer or question other candidates. This format encourages a candidate to respond briefly on a topic deemed to be less important and to use more time to discuss more fully issues considered more important. The candidates can self-moderate to balance time discrepancies. Candidates cannot “save up” time during the question period to make a speech at the end. Usually a two minute closing statement is included with this format. This format requires an experienced moderator and one timekeeper per candidate.
APPENDIX B

DEBATE CO-SPONSORSHIP GUIDELINES

It is important that the League of Women Voters maintain its nonpartisan position when co-sponsoring a debate. The first step in agreeing to co-sponsorship is to review the other organization’s mission statement to ensure that its goals are consistent with those of the League. IF A LEAGUE IS CONTACTED BY ANOTHER ORGANIZATION OR PERSON REQUESTING THAT LEAGUE HOLD OR COSPONSOR A CANDIDATE EVENT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAKE CERTAIN THAT THE OTHER’S GOALS ARE CONSISTENT WITH THOSE OF THE LEAGUE. REMEMBER THAT THE LWV BOARD WOULD NEED TO BE CONSULTED AND APPROVE THE EVENT.

Any organization co-sponsoring a debate must meet the following conditions:

- refrain from endorsing candidates or positions prior to or immediately after the debate;
- endorse the League’s guidelines for candidate participation;
- agree to accept the League’s standards of nonpartisanship and debate quality;
- treat the candidates equitably, and
- agree to issue jointly all press releases, letters and other material circulated to the public.