

## **LWV-Texas Policies and Procedures**

### **Section 1.7 Candidate Debates and Forums**

#### **1. Leagues' Responsibility for Holding Debates:**

- The LWV-TEF is responsible for organizing debates and forums for statewide offices, e.g. Governor and U.S. Senator. Debates affecting statewide offices should not be sponsored by local Leagues without LWV-TX Board approval. Where appropriate, LWV-TEF will invite local Leagues to co-sponsor debates involving candidates for statewide office.
- Local Leagues have responsibility for debates or forums for U.S. Representative, State Senator and Representative, regional candidates, and for all local candidates. Leagues should have a written debate policy, including rules, procedures and criteria, and review it annually.

#### **2. Purpose, definitions and criteria for candidates for LWV-Texas Ed Fund Debates:**

Debates and forums aim to serve the following purposes:

- Educate the public about issues;
- Allow face-to-face comparisons of the candidates and their positions;
- Stimulate and increase voter interest and participation in the election.
- For **federal** candidates, the FEC defines a debate as an event that includes at least two candidates and allows them to appear concurrently, in face-to-face confrontations, with opportunities to respond to each other.
- The FEC defines a forum or other non-debate candidate appearance as a place, meeting, or medium where ideas and views on particular issues are exchanged.

To be invited to participate in an LWV-TEF debate a candidate must:

- Meet the requirements of the Texas Constitution and/or the Constitution of the United States;
- Meet all requirements to be on the ballot according to Texas election laws;
- Demonstrate significant voter interest and support by being nominated by a recognized political party in Texas, raising sufficient funds to require reporting under FEC rules for federal races, or by showing that a formal campaign is being waged by the existence of headquarters and campaign staff.

#### **3. General Policies for Debates/Forums for State and Local Leagues**

(1) Forums and debates must be nonpartisan and ensure that all participating candidates will be treated fairly and equally.

(2) All viable candidates for the races included on the ballot for the races included must be invited to participate, and the forum must include at least two candidates. Only qualified candidates should be allowed to participate, and no substitute may stand in for a candidate, either to read a statement or to distribute campaign literature.

(3) A letter of invitation should include the criteria for participation, debate rules, and a waiver for League distribution of debate content. It should be sent to candidates in a traceable form (USPS delivered, signed mail receipt or email returned mail receipt.)

The language of the waiver should be: “The debate or forum content is the property of the LWV and permission must be sought to rebroadcast the debate or forum in its entirety or to print excerpts. Candidates must agree that he/she will not use any portion of the debate or forum in a political advertisement.”

(4) Issues of interest to the general public must be included.

(5) Meeting must be open to the public, in a place that will not seem to exclude some potential audience.

(6) Donations from candidates or political parties should not be solicited or accepted.

(7) Questions should be directed to a place, or all candidates, but not to an individual. The format can be either with oral or written questions. Written questions from audience should be screened for personal attacks or other inappropriate language.

(8) Candidate literature should be placed at the back or outside the room.

(9) Leagues may provide membership information and orally invite membership.

**Candidate Participation Guidelines (required for federal offices and advised for state and local races):**

(10) Unopposed candidates may not be speakers at a debate or forum. They may be introduced and invited to meet and greet attendees at the end of such meetings.

(11) A debate or forum should not start if only one candidate is present. If the debate or forum includes several races, the other races may begin while waiting for the late candidate.

(12) If a candidate cancels because of an emergency, the debate or forum may proceed if more than one candidate for the office is present. If only one is present, it must be cancelled (see exceptions below.) The moderator may present any factual reasons given by the candidate without editorial comment. If the candidate who cancelled provides a statement, the moderator may read it. If no reason is given, the League should state that it was contacted by the candidate or his/her campaign and told the candidate would not be able to appear. The League can state that no reason was given for canceling. Attempts may be made to reschedule the debate or forum.

One candidate for a contested office could appear under the following circumstances:

- 1) If the event is advertised as a forum or other non-debate candidate appearance (such as a meet-and-greet), but not as a debate.
- 2) If the League, but not the League Education Fund, is the sponsoring organization. In this event, no Education Fund money could be used.
- 3) The race is for a state or local office, but not for a federal office.
- 4) The event will not be broadcast.

If all of these criteria are not met, and if only one candidate for an office appears, that candidate may be introduced but may not speak or answer questions.

(For more specifics, see “Guidelines for State and Local League Debates (LWVUS).”)

(13) If a candidate refuses to participate, the League president may submit a letter to the editor of local/statewide newspapers stating that candidates are expected to participate and if they do not, they are denying the community an opportunity for public education about them and the issues.

### **Debate Locations:**

(14) **For federal-level races**, all non-debate candidate events and appearances (such as “meet-and-greet”) **must** be held at a tax-exempt school, college, or university, if it is sponsored by the League Education Fund. If the event is sponsored by the League it may be held in another location. Debates may be held at a public (government or school) facility, in-studio television facility, or in a public community facility or retirement home with good public access. (FEC regulation)

(15) For **non-federal** races, the event may be held in any location that is accessible to the public.

### **Co-sponsorship:**

(16) Co-sponsors cannot have endorsed or be affiliated with a candidate or ballot issue, and must be approved by the League Board of Directors. Any group whose leadership has made public statements for or against any candidate, or which is known to support a candidate informally, or that advocates for an issue which is on the ballot, should not be asked to co-sponsor.

(17) The League should take the lead in contacting the candidates, negotiating disputes, and controlling the format for a forum that is co-sponsored.

(18) The League should provide the moderator and timekeeper, or should approve of them in advance. The moderator should not be identified as a member of a political party or a friend of one or more of the candidates.

### **Broadcasting a debate or forum:**

(19) A radio, television or cable broadcaster must not edit the debate or forum, and it must be broadcast in its entirety, either live or reasonably soon after the debate. The debate or forum must include at least two candidates (FCC requirements). The exception is news media reporting on the event.

(20) Candidates are not allowed to use or edit the footage for campaign purposes.

(21) Cell phones must be turned off. The moderator should announce that unauthorized videos are not allowed because the FCC requires that the debate must not be edited and must be broadcast in its entirety, except by media reporting on events.

(22) The content of the tape belongs to the League and any use of the tapes requires the approval of the League with the caveat that it must be broadcast in its entirety. The footage can be posted in written or streaming audio/video on the League’s website or another website if approved by the League. It can be broken into segments as long as all segments are available.

(Also consult the LWVUS publications “FAQ’s Candidate Forums-Debates,” and “Guidelines for State and Local League Debates,” available at [lwv.org](http://lwv.org).)

*Adopted October 2009, revised December 2009*