

A Guide to *Voters Guides* For Local Leagues *revised 2011*

League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund



League of Women Voters of Texas
1212 Guadalupe St. #107
Austin, TX 78701
(512) 472-1100
(512) 472-4114 Fax
lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org
www.lwvtexas.org

Table of Contents

Overview	3
<i>Nonpartisanship Policy</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Purpose and Goals</i>	<i>3</i>
LWV-TEF Voters Guides	3
Purchase and use by local Leagues.....	4
Purchase and use by non-League entities	4
Local League Voters Guides	4
<i>Develop a plan.....</i>	<i>4</i>
Review and approve policies.....	4
Fund your <i>Voters Guide</i>	5
Verify election dates.....	5
Select candidates and races to include.	6
Determine schedule and responsibilities.....	6
<i>Contact the candidates.....</i>	<i>7</i>
Obtain candidate information.	7
Prepare the candidate packet	7
Invite the candidates.....	8
Acknowledge and check responses.....	9
<i>Research ballot propositions</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Prepare the Voters Guide</i>	<i>10</i>
Combine state and local <i>Voters Guides</i>	10
What should be included.....	10
What should NOT be included	11
Format considerations.....	11
Proofread the <i>Voters Guide</i>	11
Print the <i>Voters Guide</i>	12
<i>Distribute the Voters Guide.....</i>	<i>12</i>
Post the <i>Voters Guide</i> online.....	12
Distribute printed copies.....	12
Have copies printed in newspapers.	12
<i>Assessment</i>	<i>13</i>
Evaluate the process.	13
Maintain statistics.....	13
VOTE411 Voters Guides	13
References and Resources	13
<i>Publications and Websites.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Sample Documents</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Sample Invitation to Candidates</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Sample Instructions for Candidate Questionnaires.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Sample Voters Guide Questionnaire.....</i>	<i>17</i>

Overview

Nonpartisanship Policy

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government. Neither the League nor the LWV Education Fund supports or opposes any political party or candidate.

Purpose and Goals

The *Voters Guide* is a vital part of LWV's Voters Service/Citizen Education efforts. It is an unbiased, nonpartisan report of candidates' views and/or ballot issues. In a *Voters Guide*, the League does not take a position in support of or opposition to the candidates, parties, or issues covered.

The *Voters Guide* is one of the most valued services Leagues provide for their communities. It is truly an effort to encourage the informed participation of citizens in the election process. Many citizens and their communities have come to depend on information provided in *Voters Guides*, and they are a major reason people join and/or support the League.

This publication will address the planning and preparation of *Voters Guides* by local Leagues. Additional information can be found in the LWV-TX and LWVUS publications listed under ***Publications and Websites***. Sample candidate packets are provided in ***Sample Documents***. Your League may want to customize these sample materials, or develop your own.

LWV-TEF Voters Guides

The League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund (LWV-TEF) publishes *Voters Guides* for primary and general elections in even-numbered years and for the Constitutional Amendment election in odd-numbered years. The LWV-TEF *Voters Guides* cover candidates and/or ballot issues voted on by the entire state, including U.S. Senator, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, various commissioners, State Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals. They also include some regional races – i.e., State Board of Education and Courts of Appeals – where the regions may encompass multiple counties and be served by multiple local Leagues.

A *Voters Guide* for presidential candidates may be produced only by LWVEF and is copyrighted; therefore it may be published only within the guidelines required by LWVUS. LWV-TEF will publish the LWVUS Presidential *Voters Guide* only if LWVUS guidelines allow LWV-TEF to tailor it to conform to the Texas ballot.

For general elections, all candidates in contested races that will appear on the ballot are invited to participate, including all parties and independent candidates.

For primary elections, all candidates that will appear on the ballot in contested races for parties that hold primaries are invited to participate. A race is considered contested only if there are multiple candidates within the same party. Parties that choose their candidates by other than primary election will not be included in the primary *Voters Guide*.

Political parties whose candidates for governor in the last election received at least

20 percent of the votes cast or came in at least second in the race must hold a primary election to select candidates. Political parties whose candidates for governor received between 2 and 20 percent of the votes in the previous election have the option of holding a primary. See the Secretary of State's website for information about which political parties are holding primary elections.

The LWV-TEF *Voters Guides* are available in both print and electronic form shortly before each election. Local Leagues are sent order forms approximately two months before Election Day. The electronic guides are emailed to purchasers and posted on the website approximately five or six weeks before Election Day. The newsprint copies are shipped approximately two weeks after that.

Purchase and use by local Leagues

A local League may purchase from LWV-TEF printed copies and/or electronic copies of the state *Voters Guide*. Local Leagues that purchase printed copies of the LWV-TEF *Voters Guide* generally distribute them to public places in their communities, such as libraries, colleges, chambers of commerce, and other organizations. Using the electronic copies, they may add local issues and races to the LWV-TEF guide in the same format and then distribute them in either printed or electronic form. For regional races (State Board of Education and Courts of Appeal), local Leagues can delete the candidates who will not be on their ballot. Local Leagues may change the format of the LWV-TEF *Voters Guide* only with permission of the state Voters Service Director.

Purchase and use by non-League entities

Newspapers and other non-League entities may also purchase printed copies and/or

electronic copies of the state *Voters Guide*. Electronic copies may be printed as inserts or articles in newspapers and other publications. Whenever the LWV-TEF *Voters Guide* is reprinted, the distribution must credit the League of Women Voters Education Fund for producing the *Voters Guide*, include a statement of the League's nonpartisanship, and include the content of the candidate and/or issue statements in its entirety.

Local League Voters Guides

Local Leagues have responsibility for *Voters Guides* for U.S. Representative, State Senator and Representative, and for all local candidates on their ballot. They may also include ballot issues within their district. They should not include candidates or statewide ballot issues for which LWV-TEF has responsibility.

The *League Handbook and Directory* identifies which League or Leagues have responsibility for each district. Leagues that share districts should cooperate so that only one League contacts each candidate. For example, all Leagues in the district could agree on the questions, one League could contact the candidate and then share responses with all Leagues. If this isn't feasible, at least inform the candidate that he or she might be contacted by other Leagues in the district.

Develop a plan

Review and approve policies.

Each local League should have a policy for *Voters Guides* that conforms to and supplements the LWV-TX *Policy on Voters Guides*. The policy should be reviewed by the board each year and may include areas such as the following:

- Statement of the League’s nonpartisan policy
- When *Voters Guides* will be produced and which political contests will be included
- How to determine whether a race is contested
- What the candidate packets will include
- Rules and restrictions on candidates’ responses
- How the *Voters Guides* may be funded
- How the *Voters Guides* will be published and distributed
- Whether to list contributors
- Whether to solicit donations to LWV-TEF or local Education Fund.

In addition to reviewing and approving the general policies, the local board should also approve the following specific items for each *Voters Guide*:

- Which specific races will be included
- Questions to be asked for each office and any word limits
- Number of LWV-TX *Voters Guides* to be purchased
- Distribution plan for local League and LWV-TX *Voters Guide*
- How the *Voters Guide* will be funded

Fund your *Voters Guide*.

Education Fund money can be used to buy LWV-TEF *Voters Guides* and/or to finance your local League’s *Voters Guide*. If your *Voters Guide* includes candidates only, you can submit a project report for reimbursement from your League’s account with LWV-TEF after the project is completed. If your *Voters Guide* includes ballot issues with pro/con positions, you must get prior approval from LWV-TEF in order to be eligible for reimbursement from your League’s account with LWV-TEF. See

the *Handbook for Local League TEF Projects* for more information. In either case, be sure to follow all the TEF guidelines in the handbook.

If your local Education Fund is funding the guide, the board should discuss and approve all aspects of the project. Follow your League’s policy for seeking and accepting bids for printing the *Voters Guide*. Ensure adequate time to get board approval.

Funding may also be available through banks and companies with good community relations programs. Donations to LWV-TEF are deductible for tax purposes. Don’t overlook in-kind funding from local newspapers, which may print and distribute your *Voters Guide*.

You can sell ads to run in the *Voters Guide*, as long as they are nonpartisan. **It is inappropriate to fund the *Voters Guide* with paid political advertisements because such ads compromise the League’s nonpartisanship. It is also inappropriate to accept LWV-TEF donations from candidates, political parties or advocacy groups to pay for publishing the *Voters Guide*.**

Other ads (products, services) may be used, but a disclaimer should be displayed, such as “Reference herein to any specific commercial product, process, or service does not constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation or favoring by the LWV of XX.”

Verify election dates

Check the Secretary of State’s website (see *References and Resources*) for Uniform Election Dates. Special election dates are set by the entity holding the election, such as the county, city or school district. Look for the start and end of the candidate filing

period, as well as the last day to register to vote, the start and end of early voting, and Election Day. These dates will help you set the schedule for producing the *Voters Guide*.

Select candidates and races to include.

For general elections, invite all candidates who will be on the ballot for each contested race. Leagues should decide in advance whether to include unopposed candidates; their responses may be important in providing information to the voter. Space may be less of an issue in *Voters Guides* placed on League websites. You may also include local write-in candidates if the filing deadline permits the inclusion of all of these candidates.

For primary elections, you can decide whether to include only the parties that have primary elections (generally the Republican and Democratic parties) or to include all parties recognized by the Secretary of State’s Office, as well as declared independent and write-in candidates. You can also decide whether a race is “contested” only if there are multiple candidates within the same party, or include all races in which there are multiple candidates regardless of party.

Make candidate selection decisions in a clear, fair and reasonable way, using selection criteria established in advance by your board. It is also helpful to have criteria in place to deal with unexpected situations, such as last minute write-in candidates.

Determine schedule and responsibilities.

Establish a schedule for the *Voters Guide*, starting with milestone election dates and working backwards.

A sample schedule is outlined as follows, with the **milestone election dates in bold**.

Deadlines for other tasks are relative to these dates.

Task	Completion
Review and approve policies, funding, plans and questions for <i>Voters Guides</i> .	Board meeting prior to Candidate Filing Deadline
Obtain LWV-TEF approval if required for funding.	Candidate Filing Deadline
Prepare distribution and marketing plan including press release dates, etc.	Candidate Filing Deadline
Obtain candidate information.	Candidate Filing Deadline
Prepare and send candidate packets.	Candidate Filing Deadline plus one week
Order LWV-TEF <i>Voters Guides</i>	Six weeks before Start of Early Voting
Set deadline to receive candidate responses	Three-four weeks before Start of Early Voting
Process and acknowledge responses as received.	Deadline to receive candidate responses
Research ballot propositions.	Deadline to receive candidate responses
Prepare filler material.	Deadline to receive candidate responses
Prepare <i>Voters Guide</i> files for printing and/or posting online.	Two-three weeks before Start of Early Voting
Distribute printed <i>Voters Guides</i> and/or post files online.	One week before Start of Early Voting

The *Voters Guide* should be available prior to start of early voting. The tasks are described in more detail in the rest of this document. Be sure to assign responsibility for each task to someone in your League.

Contact the candidates

Obtain candidate information.

During the filing period or after the filing deadline, obtain the names and contact information of all candidates from the public official in charge of filing for the election. You can obtain candidate filing information from the following officials:

- Primary elections – Contact the county offices of the political parties with candidates in the races for your *Voters Guide*. All statewide offices must file with the state party, as well as certain non-statewide offices such as U.S. Representative, member of State Board of Education, Courts of Appeals Justices, and District Judges and District Attorneys, unless their district is composed of only one county. However, most county party officials will have information on those candidates who will be on the local ballot.
- General elections – Contact the Secretary of State for statewide offices, and the local Election Administrator or County Clerk for local offices.
- City elections – Contact the City Secretary.
- School board elections – Contact the school district administration office.
- Other boards and districts – Contact the administration office.

Depending on your League's policy, candidates who are running unopposed in a particular election do not need to be asked questions, but should be listed by name, party, and office.

Prepare the candidate packet

The information to be sent to each candidate includes the following: letter of invitation, instructions for submitting responses, and the questionnaire appropriate for the office. See *Sample Documents* for a sample candidate packet with detail of its contents.

Invitation: The invitation to candidates should be brief but include the League's mission and statement of nonpartisanship, the reason for the *Voters Guide* and where it will be available, the deadline for return of the questionnaire and where to submit it, and contact information for the League. The letter should be signed by the League president, but the contact person may be the Voters Service Director or some other League member.

Instructions: The instructions for submitting the questionnaire responses should be detailed and include the rules and guidelines for responses, stressing the no-editing policy and including how the League will handle responses that exceed the word limit or contain inappropriate comments about opponents. Some Leagues allow candidates a specified time to edit and re-submit responses that do not meet the League's criteria.

The instructions should prominently display how to submit the responses and the deadline for doing so. Allow approximately three weeks for the candidates to receive the invitations and submit their responses. Let the candidates know the format in which you prefer or require responses: fax, email, specified document formats. It's much

easier and more accurate to process responses that can be cut and pasted into the final document, rather than retyped and proofread.

See *Sample Instructions* for specifications to include.

Candidate Questionnaire: Candidate questions should be prepared by one or more persons who are familiar with the issues to be faced during the coming term of office. Non-League members may be asked to offer suggestions, but the local League board should make the final decision about which questions will be asked. Approval should occur well in advance of the filing date to facilitate sending the materials as soon as all the candidates are known.

Consider the number of candidates and the importance of each office in determining the number of questions and word limit. The resulting size of the *Voters Guide* is important if you plan to print it.

Topics should not be limited to those on which the League has a position or is studying. Try to predict issues in which citizens will be most interested. Avoid questions with a bias toward or against the incumbent, and topics that relate to only one candidate. Avoid questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions allow for development of the candidates' thoughts and logic. Questions from previous *Voters Guides* may also be used; sometimes the candidates' responses provide topics for future questions.

The questionnaire should include the following:

- Correct name(s) of sponsoring League organization(s) such as "LWV of Local League", "LWV of Local Education Fund," or "LWV-Texas Education Fund"

- The title "*Voters Guide*" and the date (month, date, year) of the election
- The title of the elected office and party, if applicable, for which the candidate is running
- Questions and respective word limits
- Space for candidate's printed name, verification signature, and date
- A release statement for LWV to use the responses in its *Voters Guide*
- How and where to submit the reply, the preferred or required format, and the deadline
- How and when the *Voters Guide* will be available.

Deadline for Responses from Candidates: Specify whether the deadline date/time applies to when the response is sent or when it is received. Decide whether you will grant a "grace period" beyond the deadline to accommodate last-minute situations. For example, you may set a deadline at midnight Friday but decide to accept responses through the weekend. If this is your policy, make sure that you make the same accommodation to all candidates to ensure fairness.

Invite the candidates.

If you plan to send the invitations by postal mail, prepare and print the materials as early as possible, including envelopes and certified mail receipts, if used. It is helpful to have a second person check each packet before mailing to make sure that the correct forms are included. Certified mail forms can be picked up from the post office and prepared before taking the prepared envelopes to the post office. If certified mail with a signed receipt is too expensive, plan to telephone candidates to be sure they received the request.

Many Leagues email the candidate packet, since it is faster, less expensive and gives

the candidates the questions in a file that they can return with responses. Send the email with a read receipt requested. If no receipt is returned, follow up with a phone call to make sure it was received.

Send the packet to all candidates at the same time, if possible, so that no one has more time than someone else to respond. Be sure to keep track of all communication with candidates regarding the receipt of and response to the questionnaire.

Acknowledge and check responses.

As responses come in, check word limits and other criteria. Send the candidate an acknowledgment of receipt and note any nonconformance to acceptance criteria, such as exceeding the word limit or containing an inappropriate remark. Allow a specified time to re-submit, if that's your policy. Otherwise, notify the candidate how the nonconformance will appear in the *Voters Guide* – e.g., the response will be truncated with “///” at the word limit or the response will be omitted with the comment, “Candidate’s response does not meet criteria.” The Voters Service Director should determine whether or not a response is inappropriate.

If the candidate sends a picture, make sure it meets specifications as to file type, size, content, etc. Label the picture with the candidate’s name and keep it together with the responses. You may want to make a working copy of the *Voters Guide* to fill in as responses and pictures are received.

Call candidates who have not responded two to three days before the deadline to remind them and to answer any questions. Some candidates may request an additional day or two to complete the questionnaire, citing unusual circumstances. If it is your policy

to allow extra time, be sure to treat all requests the same way.

Make sure that the responses are not edited or changed in any way, except to conform to the final format of the *Voters Guide*. For example, if your instructions specify that bold, italics, underlining and all capitals will be converted to standard format, you can change those attributes. (See ***Sample Instructions*** for possible formatting specifications.)

Keep the originals in the League files for one year.

Research ballot propositions

Carefully check the wording on ballot issues (bond issues, charter amendments, etc.), using several sources, if necessary, such as the county election official, city secretary or school administration, depending on the jurisdiction of the ballot issue.

Contact several persons or organizations that support and oppose the issue to research background about the issue as well as the pros and cons of passing it. In the *Voters Guide*, use the same format as in the LWV-TEF guides for constitutional amendment elections. For each proposition, include the ballot wording, an explanation of the background, an equal number of, and approximately equal space for, arguments for and against. Be very careful to use nonpartisan language for the explanation and pros and cons. Although different people may research different ballot issues, be sure to edit the reports for consistency and accuracy.

League positions on ballot issues must not be included in the *Voters Guide*. If the League publishes a fact sheet on its position,

it should not be distributed so that it appears as a supplement to the *Voters Guide*.

Prepare the Voters Guide

Combine state and local Voters Guides.

If you plan to add local races to a copy of the LWV-TEF *Voters Guide*, use the following guidelines:

- Local League may substitute its own masthead.
- LWV-TEF must be credited (see *LWV-TEF Handbook for Local League TEF Projects*).
- Include the copyright statement, “© League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund” in addition to a copyright statement for the local League.
- All statewide races and ballot issues must be included in their entirety.
- For regional races (State Board of Education and Courts of Appeal), the local League can delete the candidates who will not be on their ballot.

What should be included

Get a sample ballot, if available, to check on offices, candidates, and other issues on the ballot. Obtain one from local elections officials after the ballot has been certified. Many counties now have these on their websites. The order of candidates and/or ballot issues in the *Voters Guide* should appear as they do on the ballot, if known at the time.

The *Voters Guide* should always include the following information:

- Name of the local League publishing the guide
- The title *Voters Guide* (there is no apostrophe in *Voters Guide* and the title is italicized)

- Explanation of the League's mission and nonpartisanship
- Date and title (general, primary, special) of the election
- Explanation of the word limit, no-editing and inappropriate response policy
- Credit for financing (e.g., contributors, LWV-TEF or local Education Fund)
- Copyright statement, e.g., “© League of Women Voters of Texas Education Fund” or “© League of Women Voters of [your League] Education Fund.” Formal copyright registration is only necessary if an infringement suit is to be filed. This may be done after the *Voters Guide* is published and after an infringement has occurred.

The *Voters Guide* may also include any of the following information:

- Requirements, salaries, and duties of each contested office
- Secretary of State's phone number and website
- County Clerk/Election Administrator's phone number and website
- Precinct map and polling places (Revise for each *Voters Guide*. Check for accuracy with the election officer responsible, as this information may change from election to election.)
- Maps of districts or lists of precincts for offices such as state representatives, county commissioners, justices of the peace, and constables
- Polling places and times
- Absentee voting information
- Early voting information
- Space for a mailing label, postage, and return address
- Dates and places of candidates forums and debates
- Eye-catching "Get Out the Vote" ads

- List of contributors to the *Voters Guide*. As noted previously, contributions from candidates are inappropriate.
- Contribution blank for local Education Fund or your LWV-TEF account. (You may also want to include a list of the trustees of the local Education Fund.)
- Statement: "For more information, contact LWV-Local League" followed by the local phone number and email address.

Filler material can be developed and completed in the weeks before the candidate questionnaires are returned.

What should NOT be included

It is not appropriate to put membership information in a *Voters Guide* funded with 501(c)(3) (Education Fund) money. However, the 501(c)(4) organization may purchase a membership ad to be published in the *Voters Guide*. The price should be prorated based on space; e.g., if a *Voters Guide* is five pages and the membership ad is half a page, the ad should cost 10% of the printing and distribution costs.

Voters Guides should not include political advertising or any information that is partisan.

Format considerations

- Ballot Propositions: List ballot propositions by number.
- Primary Elections: List the candidates by elective office (including place or precinct number), then by party. If you know the ballot order, list the parties and candidates for each office in that order; otherwise, use alphabetical order for parties and candidates within parties.
- General Elections: List the candidates by elective office (including place or precinct number). If you know the ballot order, list the candidates in that order;

otherwise, list them in alphabetical order by party. Don't forget minor parties and independent candidates.

- Before each group of candidates, show the title of the office and any additional information such as requirements, salaries and duties.
- You may present the questions once for each office, or repeat for each candidate for that office. Be consistent throughout the guide. If you do not repeat the question, it may be helpful to assign a short "tag" to indicate the topic, e.g., "Economy," "Environment," etc.
- For each candidate, show the name as it will appear on the ballot, picture if provided, place or precinct number if applicable, party affiliation if applicable and responses to questions.
- Make sure the total presentation is fair to candidates running in the same race.
- For online guides: Make sure that the font size will be easy to read if printed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Choose a file format (e.g., PDF) that is accessible for most users.
- For printed guides: Make sure that the font size will be easy to read in the selected paper size. Choose a file format accepted by the printer and observe any specifications for margins, number of pages, etc. Leave adequate space for a bulk-mailing label if needed for distribution.

Proofread the Voters Guide.

Proofreading is a special skill and ideally should be done by more than one person, at least one of whom has not prepared the *Voters Guide*. Reading copy aloud in teams of two works well. Proofread each set of corrections and check the final copy just before sending to the printer or posting online. Give attention to typographical errors as well as general layout, consistency of listings and spacing, and omissions or

duplications of candidates and/or responses. Be sure that all pictures are matched to the correct candidates. Be certain that proofreaders know not to change candidates' mistakes. Check the dates in the filler, especially if information from previous *Voters Guides* is used.

Print the Voters Guide.

The date the copy will be given to the printer, as well as the completion date, should be set early in the planning of the *Voters Guide*. Most printers prefer electronic copies of the *Guide*. Examples of previous *Voters Guides* may be helpful to illustrate the format. Determine whether the printer will ship the guides and/or whether the local League will distribute them.

Distribute the Voters Guide

Post the Voters Guide online.

If you are going to post the *Voters Guide* on the League website, work with your webmaster to determine how much lead time is needed and with your publicity chair to determine how to get the word out once it is online. Consider press releases, links from other websites, email to other organizations and colleges, flyers at the library and other public entities. Remember that some publicity outlets may have early deadlines for press releases.

Send electronic copies of the *Voters Guide* to LWV-TX at lwvtexas@lwvtexas.org, and to LWVUS at voterinfo@lww.org.

Distribute printed copies.

Evaluate past distribution sites and also consider new and better places. Libraries, colleges, government buildings, hospitals, banks, post offices and other buildings frequented by citizens are good places to have the *Voters Guide* available and to publicize the website. If at all possible, mail

the *Voters Guides* to members, contributors, media, elected officials, and candidates. The Chamber of Commerce and local businesses and organizations may make a contribution to the League in order to have *Voters Guides* available for their employees and clients.

Determine the date the *Voters Guides* will be picked up from the printer and delivered to distribution points. If the *Voters Guide* is to be distributed by the League, arrange for members to pick up copies at a League meeting or other convenient pick-up place. If time permits, use bulk mail to distribute *Voters Guides*. Call your post office for information on bulk mail. Keep some *Voters Guides* to replenish stocks and for last-minute orders.

Have copies printed in newspapers.

Work with a local newspaper to use the *Voters Guide* as an insert in the paper or ask to have it printed in the paper as a community service. Begin negotiations early. Talk to other Leagues about methods of working with newspapers. If your local newspaper is part of a chain, find out which other newspapers are owned by the chain and if other Leagues work with those papers. It may take time to establish a working relationship with a newspaper, but the increased distribution of the *Voters Guide* is worth the effort.

When publishing a *Voters Guide* in a newspaper, some Leagues also buy an overrun of the newspaper insert and distribute it throughout the community. Others pay for publishing the guide in the newspaper.

If the newspaper prints the *Voters Guide* as part of the newspaper instead of including it as an insert, it is inappropriate for the newspaper to use political ads as a part of

the *Voters Guide*. The newspaper must credit the League of Women Voters Education Fund for producing the *Voters Guide*, include a statement of the League's nonpartisanship, and include the content of the candidate and/or issue statements in its entirety. Discuss this in advance with the newspaper. If you have questions, contact the LWV-TX Voters Service Director.

Assessment

Evaluate the process.

A written evaluation of the complete *Voters Guide* effort (instructions, time line, financing, distribution, and other matters) is helpful to future planners and will enable them to complete the job successfully.

Maintain statistics.

To help in future planning and requests for funding, keep statistics on the number of printed copies distributed and the number of times the *Voters Guide* was accessed from your website. Also send these statistics to the LWV-TX Voters Service Director.

VOTE411 Voters Guides

VOTE411 is online *Voters Guide* software offered by LWVUS to provide a one-stop solution for voters. Its "On Your Ballot" feature allows voters to enter their home address and review all races and ballot initiatives specific to that address, from President to the local JP, that have been entered by national, state and local Leagues. LWV-TX and several local Leagues have already used VOTE411 and found it to be a more convenient way to provide *Voters*

Guides to the community and a simpler way to contact candidates and gather their responses. VOTE411 allows Leagues to control the questions and review candidate responses, which candidates can enter directly online, while it automates candidate notification and tracking. Separate materials are available from LWVUS for planning and implementing voter information in VOTE411.

References and Resources

Publications and Websites

LWVUS publications (available at www.lwv.org):

- *Voters Guides Best Practices*
- *In League* (LWVUS Pub. #275)
- VOTE411 webinars and *Online Voters' Guide How-To Manual*

LWV-TX publications (available at www.lwvtexas.org):

- *Policy on Voters Guides*
- *Handbook for Local Leagues TEF Projects*
- *League Handbook and Directory*

Secretary of State's Office (available at www.sos.state.tx.us):

- Election dates
- Political party information

Sample Documents

Candidate packet: letter, instructions, questionnaire

Sample Invitation to Candidates
[Use LWV logo and/or local League letterhead]

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

[Date]

Dear Candidate:

The League of Women Voters of [your League] invites you to be included in our nonpartisan *Voters Guide* for the [name of election]. This publication provides voters in our community with unbiased, nonpartisan information on candidates for office. Most of the information about candidates comes from the candidates themselves in their own words. This year our *Voters Guide* will include candidates for [offices included].

Please complete the attached questionnaire according to the instructions provided.

The *Voters Guide* will be distributed in hard copy, via email, and on the League website. By signing the questionnaire, you allow the League to publish your responses as you submitted them in all formats that will provide information to voters.

Your responses to this questionnaire must be received by [time] on [date]. Questionnaires may be mailed to [address], emailed to [email], or faxed to [fax number].

Thank you for your participation in the [name of election] *Voters Guide*. LWV of [your League] is proud to publish the *Voters Guide* to help educate voters and involve them in the electoral process. You may direct your questions to [name of contact] whose contact information is given below.

Sincerely,

[name and signature of League president]

[name and contact information of Voters Service Director or contact person]

Enclosure: Questionnaire, Instructions



League of Women Voters of [*your League*]
[*address, email, fax, phone*]

Sample Instructions for Candidate Questionnaires

1. **All replies must be received by [date and time].** No late responses will be accepted. If your reply is not received by that date and time, the words “*No response received*” will appear by your name in the *Voters Guide*.
 - **Email responses to the questionnaire** to [*email*]. A downloadable version of the questionnaire is available at [*URL if available on your website*]
 - **Email a photo** with your response, preferably .jpg format. A photo is not required, but if you provide one we will include it with your response.
 - **Fax a signed copy of the questions and responses** to [*fax number*] to ensure security and accuracy.
2. Your **responses will NOT be edited** for spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors.
3. **Content:**
 - **Do** provide direct, relevant responses to the questions asked.
 - **Do not refer to opponents.** Such a reference will result in the deletion of your entire response to the question. Instead “*Response does not meet criteria*” will be printed.
 - **Do not include your website address** or other contact information in your responses. If included, this information will be deleted. If space permits, we will print a list of candidate websites in the *Voters Guide*.
4. The **word limits** on the questionnaire are strictly adhered to. *We will not print any part of your response beyond the word limit.* If the response is cut, it will be indicated with slash (//) marks. Our **rules for counting words** are:
 - ALL words, numbers, and symbols are counted, including *a, and, &, +, but, I, the.*
 - Abbreviations and acronyms (USA) count as one word, while “United States of America” counts as four words.
 - A date written as 3/6/12 counts as one word, while March 6, 2012 counts as three words.
 - Words combined by hyphens or slashes will be counted as separate words – e.g., up-to-the-minute (**4 words**), past/present (**2 words**).
5. **Format:**
 - Replies will be printed in a conventional upper- and lower-case format. **Bold typeface, italics, underlining** and ALL CAPITALS will be converted to standard format.
 - Replies will be printed in block paragraph form, not in outline or list format. Please do not use numbers or bullet points.
6. **Keep a copy** of the questionnaire and your responses for your files.

7. All replies and pictures become the property of the League of Women Voters of [*your League*]. The **Voters Guide is copyrighted** and may not be reproduced in whole or in part without the express permission of the League.
8. **QUESTIONS?** Contact us [*name, phone, email*]

League of Women Voters of [your League]
Sample Voters Guide Questionnaire
for [name of election]
Return by: [date and time]

Candidate Name (as printed on ballot) _____
Party _____ Telephone _____ Fax _____
Campaign Contact _____ Title _____
Campaign Address _____
Campaign Website _____
Campaign Email _____

State Board of Education Candidate

1. What training and experience qualify you for this position? (50 words)
2. What criteria should be used in developing and approving curriculum standards for courses? (75 words)
3. What are the two most serious public education issues facing the State Board of Education during your term, and how would you address them? (75 words)

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT: I release for publication by the League of Women Voters of [your League], in print and online, my responses to this questionnaire, along with my photograph.

Candidate's signature _____ Date _____

Please verify that...

- The word count does not exceed stated limits for each question.
- Your response does not contain references to other candidates.
- Your responses are emailed to the League.
- A photograph (jpg) of yourself is attached to email, if desired.
- A signed copy of this questionnaire and the answers are faxed to [fax number]

If you have questions, please call or email:

[your League]

[address]

[email, phone]