



A Guide to Candidates Forums For Local Leagues 2021 ©

League of Women Voters of Texas

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Welcome

The League of Women Voters of Texas is a nonpartisan, grassroots civic organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to people 16 and older of all gender identities. With 100 years of experience, the League is one of America's oldest and most trusted civic nonprofit organizations.

Nonpartisanship Policy

The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes any political party or political candidate.

Purpose and Goals

Candidate forums and debates are important venues for furthering the League's nonpartisanship mission. Forums sponsored by the LWV, or in which the LWV participates, must be nonpartisan and must ensure that all participating candidates will be treated fairly and equally.

The purpose of debates and forums is to educate the public about issues, allow face-to-face comparisons of the candidates and their positions, and stimulate and increase voter interest and participation in the election. The forum may address, but not be limited to, issues considered to be of important educational interest to the League and any co-sponsoring organizations. Issues of interest to the general public must be included.

A candidate **forum** is a live public meeting in which all the candidates for one or more offices present their views in short individual speeches, and then answer questions from the audience. A **debate** allows the candidates to appear concurrently, in face-to-face confrontations, with opportunities to respond to each other.

Additional information can be found at LWVTexas.org on the Voter Education page under League Management and at LWV.org. Sample invitations, forum guidelines and moderator scripts are provided in the Appendix. Also included is a Memorandum of Understanding template to be used when partnering with other organizations to host a forum. Your League may customize any of these materials, or develop your own.

If a situation related to a debate or forum arises that is not covered in this Guide, contact the state office, or the LWV Texas Chair, Voter Services.

Plan the Forum

Set the date

Choose a date after the filing deadline and before the start of early voting (if it is scheduled in your area) or before the election. These dates can be found on the Secretary of State's website votetexas.gov. The forum may be recorded and presented on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and/or embedded on your website.

Choose forum platform

Determine whether your forum will be held in-person, using a virtual platform or a hybrid event.

- In-person: An in-person forum must be open and accessible to the public, so choose a place that will not seem to exclude some potential audience. Keep in mind the expected attendance, need for microphones or media equipment, and an appropriate staging area for the candidates and moderator. Check policies for food or beverages if you plan to have them available. Use the [Diversity Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\) Lens Events checklist](#) and the [Able-Bodied Privilege and Accessible Event Planning](#) to evaluate locations.

Check your League's insurance policy to be sure coverage is adequate or that a co-sponsor or the facility where the event is being held has sufficient coverage. Contact the LWV Texas if you require a co-sponsor.

- Online: Shifting to a virtual platform can be more inclusive and allow for greater attendance and participation. Choose a platform such as Zoom or Google Meet and educate yourself on its features, including capacity limits, how it integrates with other platforms and the options available for hosts, panelists, and participants to interact. Practice by running through the entire event with all participants, including the candidates. Consider closed captioning and/or translation options.
- Hybrid event: While hybrid events do have the advantage of having the panelists and moderators in the same room, they can result in added costs and technical challenges to the event.
- Other: Some Leagues have forums that are not done before a live audience, such as those recorded in a studio where only League members and the candidates are present. In this case, questions are typically gathered from the community prior to the event using social media.

Resource

- [Zoom Best Practices and Sharing \(Livestreaming\) to Facebook \(from the League of Women Voters of Florida\)](#)

Consider partnering with a co-sponsor

Co-sponsors must understand that the League cannot waive any of its nonpartisanship policies and procedures. Co-sponsors cannot have endorsed or been affiliated with a candidate or ballot issue, nor should they have any plans to make any future endorsements.

The League should take the lead in contacting the candidates, negotiating disputes, and controlling the format. The League should provide the moderator and timekeeper, or should approve of these in advance.

Co-sponsors may:

- Participate in planning, finding facilities, obtaining TV (*perhaps says media since it could be radio, youtube, etc.*) coverage, and providing publicity, volunteers and refreshments;
- Publicize the event in their newsletters and encourage attendance; and/or
- Contribute monetarily, but this is not required.

Consider delineating the responsibilities in writing in advance with the co-sponsoring organization(s).

Some groups that may be appropriate co-sponsors include, but are not limited to:

- Local chapter of NAACP, LULAC, AARP, or AAUW
- Chamber of Commerce
- PTA
- Neighborhood association
- Law enforcement association
- Civic club or organization
- Environmental organization or garden club.

In order to protect our nonpartisanship, political parties and political organizations should not be asked to co-sponsor because they have a vested interest in their candidates. It would be allowable to work with them in nonpartisan elections, such as city council or school board, but even then the League needs to avoid being linked with any one party. Any group whose leadership has made public statements for or against any candidate, that 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.

References:

[Guidance for Leagues about Nonpartisanship and Partnerships](#)

[DEI Module 4: Understanding and Partnering With Your Community - Part 1](#)

[DEI Module 5: Understanding and Partnering With Your Community - Part 2](#)

[Fund your forum](#)

Candidate forums, or public educational forums on public policy issues or ballot issues, are educational and do not advocate for a certain candidate or issue. Money from a League's general fund may be used, as well as donations from co-sponsoring organizations. **Do not take or solicit donations from candidates or political parties. Do not sell ads for candidates or issues in any handouts or newsletters.**

Determine which races to include

Local Leagues have responsibility for forums for U.S. Representative, State Senator and Representative, regional candidates (including State Board of Education and Courts of Appeals, subject to approval of LWV Texas), and for all local candidates. The [Voter Services Shared District Tracking List](#) identifies which League(s) have responsibility for each district. Leagues that share districts may consider co-sponsoring a candidates forum.

Forums affecting statewide offices should not be sponsored by local Leagues without LWVTX Board approval and co-sponsorship.

Consider how many contested races will be on the ballot in your area, and how many candidates are running in each. You may not be able to hold forums for every office. Or you may want to have several forums, either back-to-back on the same day, or on different dates. If possible, include all contested races for the same type of office – e.g., state representative – in the same forum.

- For general elections: Invite all candidates who will be on the ballot for each race included in the forum.
- For primary elections: Candidates running in different party primaries may be asked to appear in different forums, or they may be included in the same forum. You must also decide whether to include only the parties that have primary elections (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.

Make candidate selection decisions in a transparent, 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.

Check the Voter Education section of LWVTX Policies and Procedures Manual (found on the Publications page under League Management at LWVTexas.org) for the policies for Candidate Debates and Forums.

Consider the format and timing

Do you want to have opening/closing statements and Q&A, or an informal “meet and greet” or “candidate fair”, where candidates can meet voters individually, talk to them, and hand out campaign information? It may be possible to combine a structured forum, with an informal “meet and greet” or reception before or after.

For a structured forum, plan on an introductory statement (often three to five minutes) and a closing statement (one to two minutes) from each candidate, and add that to the time for questions for each office. The forum should not exceed two hours.

Some Leagues give more questioning time to the higher offices; some do not include the Justices of the Peace and Constables, or just give them time for a short speech.

Decide how to ask questions

Do you want to have questions from the audience, from a panel and/or from a moderator? If you use a panel or moderator, they must have no previous relationship with any of the candidates. If you want questions from the audience, do you want to use written or oral questions? The pros and cons of each method are presented below, but on the whole, written questions provide much more control and allow a broader range of questions, but oral questions allow for livelier discussions. Consider the audience when choosing the method or perhaps a combination of methods.

It is not recommended that questions be shared with candidates prior to the event for the following reasons:

- Responses may have been written by someone else.
- It is informative to evaluate a candidate's ability to respond spontaneously, and to give organized and appropriate responses as would be required if elected to office.
- Candidates need a good working knowledge of the issues and duties of the office which they are seeking. Having the questions in advance may not provide an indication of such knowledge.

You may consider asking the candidates to avoid using their cell phones and any written material when they take part in a forum so they cannot research questions being asked while another candidate is answering. You may provide some note paper with pen/pencil for candidates to make notes during the forum.

Oral questions

Oral questions allow for more active audience participation, but have several drawbacks: The questioner may ramble or attempt to make a speech, may personally attack a candidate, or may ask a question that does not really pertain to the office. Often a certain question triggers similar questions in the audience's mind, limiting time to explore other areas of interest. Sometimes one questioner may dominate as others in the audience defer to them. It can sometimes be hard to hear the questioner, or to understand their point.

If you decide to use oral questions, consider the following suggestions:

- Specify a time limit for asking the question, e.g. 30 seconds.
- Have questioners use a microphone so everyone can hear them.
- Make sure the audience knows the "rules" for questions: addressed to an office, not an individual, no personal attacks, etc. And, be prepared to disqualify a question if it is inappropriate.
- Ask for questions for a specific office, if its candidates haven't had enough "air time."

Written questions

Written questions have several advantages: The audience has time to think of good questions, and to craft them in writing. A range of interests is often reflected in the questions.

With written questions, question screeners can be used to:

- Eliminate or rephrase questions that are inappropriate or poorly written.
- Reword questions addressed to an individual candidate so they apply to all candidates.
- Group questions that are similar or are about the same subject, leaving more time for other questions.
- Write reserve questions to be used if the audience does not submit enough questions to fill the time allotted.
- Prioritize questions so that the more important ones are first.

Televising or recording the forum

Leagues often work with the media to obtain the broadest possible coverage.

- Check with your local television station to determine if they would like to broadcast the forum live or record it for delayed broadcast. Many cities film candidates forums for broadcast on community access cable channels. A media department of a local college may be able to provide technical assistance.
- Newspapers need content for their website and might podcast or webcast a forum as well as advertise it in the newspaper.
- Post the video on your League website, Facebook page or other social media channels. The goal is to reach as many potential voters as possible, so website availability and rebroadcast times should be well advertised.

For in-person, virtual or hybrid events, LWVUS recommends that debate or forum moderators issue a verbal statement at the beginning of the event to this effect: “Recordings of this event, whether they be in-person or on a digital device, may not be used without the express written approval of the League. The League will only allow audio/video of this event to be broadcast in its entirety, except by the media reporting on the event.” This statement should also be written in the description of the virtual event.

No part of a candidate’s remarks should be edited, and candidates are not allowed to use any part of the forum for campaign purposes. If the recording needs to be shortened for broadcast, League members should work with the film editor to make sure only non-essential portions are edited out. A broadcast can be cut into segments, as long as all segments are available.

For more detailed information, check the policies for candidate debates and forums in the Voter Education section of the LWVTX Policies and Procedures Manual ([which can be found on the Publications page under League Management at LWVTexas.org](#)).

Does the Texas Open Meetings Act apply?

The Texas Open Meetings Act, adopted in 1967, requires meetings of governmental bodies to be open to the public, including informal meetings. If a quorum of a governmental body (such as a city council, school board, or county commissioners court) attends a candidates forum, that forum may be subject to requirements of the Texas Open Meetings Act. To constitute a quorum, included are not only incumbents who are candidates participating in the forum, but also any other members of the governmental body who are in the audience.

The act requires public notice of the time, place and subject matter of such a meeting, as well as minutes or tape recordings of the session. The act also permits members of the public to record open meetings with a digital device, tape recorder, video camera or other means of aural or visual reproduction.

The responsibility for deciding whether a forum is an open meeting under the act belongs to the elected officials and their governmental body, not the League or other sponsor of a candidates forum. If the forum is considered an open meeting, the governmental body must provide notice and record of the meeting. The League or sponsoring organization should be in contact with the governmental body to coordinate any arrangements for recording the forum and to ensure that notice of the meeting states that it is a forum with questions being posed to the candidates. If the forum is determined to be an open meeting, the League, whether it is a sponsor or moderator, may not prohibit members of the public from recording it.

The *Open Meetings 2018 Handbook* on the Texas Attorney General's website, as noted in **Resources**, has more detailed information.

Prepare for the Forum

Obtain candidate information

During 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. If you contact the candidates during the filing period, you can ask them to "save the date" and to let you know of any major conflicts for the date. Then, after the filing deadline, do a final check to make sure you have a complete candidate list.

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 being covered by your forum. 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, 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.

Invite the candidates

Send a written invitation, signed by the president of the League or organization, which includes information about the forum, the criteria for participation, debate/forum format and rules, a form of candidate's acceptance of format and rules, and a waiver for League distribution of debate content, including video recordings. (See *Sample Documents* in the Appendix.) It should be sent to candidates in a traceable form (email with a read receipt requested or USPS with a signed mail receipt).

The invitation should state that only the qualified candidates will be allowed to participate, and no substitutes or stand-ins will be allowed to speak for a candidate. The only possible exception might be the death of a candidate after filing and before the election, when the name will still appear on the ballot. The stand-in could then explain what a vote for the deceased candidate would mean, but would not participate in the question/answer period.

If not all candidates for an office can attend the forum, be sure that you comply with League policies on "empty-chair" debates, as detailed in the *Guidelines for State and Local League Debates*, the link which can be found in the Candidate Forums section of the Voter Education page under League Management at LWVTexas.org.

In general, you must have at least two candidates for each office participating in the forum if any one or more of the following conditions are true:

- the office is a federal office, or
- the event is advertised as a debate and not a forum or meet-and-greet, or
- the forum is to be broadcast.

In other cases, a single candidate may appear as long as all candidates for the office were invited and the event would not damage the League's nonpartisan reputation by creating the impression that the League favored one candidate over another.

If candidates refuse 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.

Send other invitations

Invite media members to cover the event. Candidates in uncontested races and current elected officials may be invited, as a courtesy, as well as city or school administrators.

Appoint forum officials

- Moderator – The moderator should be thoroughly familiar with LWV policies and principles, especially nonpartisanship. The moderator’s political views and positions should be generally unknown in order to avoid any appearance of bias or partisanship. The moderator should not be identified as a member of a political party or a friend of any of the candidates. A member of a neighboring League might be asked to serve as moderator, or even a non-League member.
- Timekeeper – The timekeeper should keep accurate time with a stopwatch and signal time remaining to the speaker.
- Question Screener – If written questions from the audience are used (in-person) or if participants are able to submit questions via the Q&A function (virtual), one or more persons should be appointed to screen the questions before giving them to the moderator or posing them to the candidates (as previously described under **Decide how to ask questions**). The screener should have a working knowledge of the issues pertaining to the election.
- Technical Coordinator - For virtual meetings, assign someone to recite the technical rules and guidelines, and to be on hand to monitor technical issues.
- Question collectors/ushers – For in-person events, these volunteers direct people to seats, pass out question forms, and collect them from the audience during the forum.

Prepare promotional and/or printed material

Arrange publicity through print and other media, including social media, public service announcements on radio and television. Put announcements in League newsletters, on VOTE411.org and in *Voters Guides*. Send email to co-sponsors and other organizations. Consider signs and banners for the forum venue, and posters or flyers to place in businesses or public places.

For in-person forums:

- Print programs for the audience, with information about the candidates and offices, the forum format, election dates, dates and media channels of recordings, and the League’s contact information and nonpartisan policy.
- Print a nameplate to place in front of each candidate, showing the candidate’s name and office sought.
- Have *Voters Guides*, VOTE411.org information such as bookmarks, membership forms and other League publications available during the forum, but avoid any publications that advocate for a certain position.

For virtual events:

- Post voting information and the LWVTX Voting & Elections links in the chat function.
- Include a slide at the beginning and end of the forum reminding participants about voting dates, the League's contact information and nonpartisan policy,

Visit the site

In-person events - Before the event, visit the site to determine the staging. Check the availability of a podium or lectern for the moderator, and tables for the candidates. Determine the arrangement of the candidates, and the placement of panelists, if used, and the question screeners. Consider whether the audio is sufficient; several microphones are preferable to just one. Determine whether the seats for the audience will have to be arranged just prior to the event. If the forum will be recorded, consider where the camera will be placed. Make sure the backdrop is pleasing and appropriate. Check the location of light switches and heater/air conditioner thermostat or fans. Arrange for a table outside the meeting room for the candidates' campaign literature, as well as League literature. Check the availability of restrooms and fire exits.

Virtual and Hybrid Forums - Before the event, the Technical Coordinator should guide several run-throughs of the event, testing audio and visual access for all participants, including at least one practice with the candidates.

Manage the Forum

Set up the room

For an in-person event, on the day of the forum, the **Forum Coordinator** and other volunteers should arrive early to do the final set up, to place water and nameplates at the candidates' tables and to set up a sign-in table for all attendees. Designate a person to greet the candidates as they arrive, check them off a list, and answer any questions about the format. Have question forms for the audience, and ushers to pass them out and take them to the screener or moderator. During the event, watch to make sure everything is running smoothly.

Regardless of format (in-person, virtual or hybrid), for League record keeping purposes, establish a process to tally the number of attendees, including candidates and their staff, news media, general public, and League members.

Run the meeting

The **League President**, Forum Coordinator or Moderator should welcome the audience and candidates and explain the purpose of the event and the League's nonpartisan policy. A statement of the importance of voting and participating in government may be included.

The **Technical Coordinator** should give an overview of the functions of the virtual platform.

The **Moderator** should explain the format, including time limits and how questions and answers will be handled. He or she should introduce the timekeeper and explain how time limits will be signaled to the candidates. It is important to remind both the candidates and the audience that no personal attacks will be allowed.

The **Timekeeper** should sit on the front row (or be visible on screen) to be easily seen by the candidates and moderator and should have a stopwatch and some device or sign for signaling the candidates as to their time limits. Signs to indicate time left are better than bells or gavels, which are more disruptive. Establish a procedure for handling "over-run" statements by the candidates.

If the forum has been deemed subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act, the League or sponsoring organization may announce at the beginning that the forum is considered an open meeting and as such is being recorded by the governmental entity and provide information as to how the recording will be available. Anyone who wants to record all or any part of the open meeting should be allowed to do so, according to the provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act.

If the forum has not been deemed an open meeting, announce at the beginning that mobile phones should be turned off as a matter of courtesy and that unauthorized photographs or videos are not allowed because the FCC requires that a forum must not be edited and must be broadcast in its entirety, except by media reporting on events.

Candidates are not allowed to use or edit the footage for campaign purposes. Realistically, there is no way to guarantee that someone won't capture some video or audio without our knowledge so a disclaimer should also be put in the guidelines for the debate. The League wants to ensure that information is not manipulated to create false or misleading impressions.

The Moderator should introduce each group of candidates and explain the duties of the office, salaries, and term, if these are not available in printed form. He or she should be familiar with the candidates' names, party affiliations, and the order in which they will be seated. The Moderator should have a system of determining the speaking order of the candidates, such as alphabetic or ballot order or by random draw. It is a good idea to vary the speaking order during opening, closing and question responses. One method is to place all names within a container and draw one at a time. Use a separate draw of names for opening and closing statements. When there are more than three candidates, it is suggested that the moderator determine a process to track which candidates have already spoken to a question and which have not, so that no one is overlooked.

After the candidates' opening statements, allow time for the candidates to respond to questions from the audience or panel. Candidates' responses should be timed and can usually be limited to one minute. Questions should be directed to an office or place, or all candidates, but not to an individual.

At the end of the question period, allow each candidate to make a closing statement of a pre-set length, so they may correct any misimpression and/or thank the audience.

The League President or Moderator should make any closing announcements. Thank the candidates and the audience for their attendance and participation, remind them of *Voters Guide* availability and/or publication date, early voting dates, and media channels where the recording of the event can be found. Also, direct the participants to VOTE411.org. A *Sample Moderator Script* can be found in the Appendix.

Head off problems and disruptions

The Moderator should be aware of any hot issues that might cause difficulty. He or she must maintain proper decorum, and should not become nervous, angry, rude, or overly casual. Humor often diffuses a tense situation.

In recent years, members of the audience have asked for recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, or requested some other addition or change to the agenda. If you anticipate this type of request, it's best to determine ahead of time how to handle it. Ask the candidates if they generally have an opening ceremony at their meetings, such as the Pledge of Allegiance. You can either add it to the agenda or be prepared to explain why the original agenda will be maintained.

Find out if there are any candidate activities planned before or after the forum that would require more crowd control measures, such as directions to the meeting place or additional security personnel.

Consider the following tips to help address any unplanned activities or disruptions that may occur:

- Have the Moderator meet with the candidates before the forum starts to re-affirm their understanding and agreement to the rules and format.
- Distribute or email an agenda and/or format rules to all participants.
- Consider having police or security people present at the event.
- Have a number of League members sprinkled throughout the audience to help maintain order.
- Moderators should be prepared to keep their composure and maintain a strong, yet civil tone that exemplifies the respectful discourse expected of Leagues.
- Include a statement like the following in the Moderator's opening remarks:
"In order to ensure that you have the most time to hear from the candidates running to represent you, we have established the format, time and terms for this forum together. All candidates (you might choose to name them) have agreed in advance to the following rules." And then read the agenda and rules or format.
- If there's pushback from the audience – perhaps consider a couple of quick options:
 - o "If we hear no objection from the candidates and those assembled, we'll take a minute to do that before we start." (or)
 - o "We are happy to entertain that at the end as time allows."

Evaluation

With the Board and forum workers, conduct an evaluation of how the forum worked, and write down what should be changed in the future. Then send thank-you notes to the candidates for appearing and for running for office. After the election, you may want to send congratulations to the winners, as well as encouragement to the candidates who did not win, thanking them for their participation in the political process. If you have received approval to use the League of Women Voters of Texas grant, file the appropriate project reports to apply for reimbursement.

Moderate a Non-LWV Forum

Many organizations ask the League to moderate their candidate forums. In such cases, the League must still ensure that the forum meets League standards for nonpartisanship and fairness to candidates, i.e.:

- All candidates for the offices are invited.
- All candidates are given equal time and opportunity to make opening and closing remarks and answer questions from the audience.
- Questions, whether written or oral, are based on issues, do not include personal attacks, and are presented to all candidates for an office for response.
- The forum conforms to League policies such as videotaping and placement of candidate materials.

Be sure to provide the organization with a copy of the LWVTX *Policy on Candidates Forums* prior to agreement to moderate the forum.

The sponsoring organization should meet the same guidelines as a co-sponsor for a League forum; they must be approved by the League Board of Directors and cannot have endorsed or been affiliated with a candidate or ballot issue. The event cannot be publicized as a League forum.

However, the sponsoring organization, not the League, may take the lead in setting the date, arranging a venue, funding the event, providing volunteers and publicizing the event. They may also invite the candidates, as long as the League nonpartisanship standards are maintained. The sponsoring organization and the League should agree on the format of the forum.

The League should provide the moderator, timekeeper and question screener, if possible. Additional volunteers may come from the sponsoring organization.

If the forum is to be broadcast or recorded, League policies on broadcasts must be maintained. Any use of forum recordings requires the express written approval of the League; and the League will only allow audio/video to be broadcast in its entirety, except by the media reporting on the event.

Resources

LWVUS publications (available at lww.org):

- “FAQ’s Candidate Forums-Debates”
- “Guidelines for State and Local League Debates”
- “Hosting Virtual and Hybrid Candidate Forums During Covid”

LWVTX publications (available at lwwtexas.org):

- *Policy on Candidates Forums*
- *Handbook for Local Leagues TEF Projects*
- *League Handbook and Directory*

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

- Election dates
- Political party information

Texas Attorney General's Office (available at oag.state.tx.us):

- *Open Meetings 2018 Handbook*
(<https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/open-government/Open-Meetings-Handbook-2018.pdf>)

Appendix

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]

To Candidates for:

[Name of office and place]: [names of candidates and party, if appropriate]

Dear Candidates:

The League of Women Voters of *[your League]* invites you to participate in a public candidates forum to provide information to voters for the coming *[give date and type]* Election. The purpose of the forum is to educate the public about issues, allow face-to-face comparisons of the candidates and their positions, and stimulate and increase voter interest and participation in the election.

The candidate forum will be *[date and time]* at *[location and address]*.

[If you will have multiple sessions, state the time of each session and which candidates will appear, as follows:]

We will have two sessions, as follows:

Session 1, *[time]*, for *[name of office]* candidates

Meet & Greet, *[time]*, for all candidates in both sessions

Session 2, *[time]*, for *[name of office]* candidates

Details of the forum and its format are in the attached *Forum Guidelines and Participation Agreement*.

I would appreciate your response regarding participation in the candidate forum no later than ***[deadline for response]***. You may contact our Forum Coordinator by email or telephone, using the contact information below. As we receive responses, we will update the list of participating candidates on our website *[URL for website]*.

Thank you for your participation.

[name and signature of League president]

[name and contact information of Voters Service Director or other forum coordinator]

Sample Forum Guidelines and Participation Agreement

[Use LWV logo and/or local League letterhead]

[Contact information for forum coordinator]

Guidelines for Candidate Forum

[Name of forum]

[date and time of forum]

[location of forum]

[description of format, such as the following:]

U.S. Representatives 10:00 – 11:00

Candidate Meet & Greet 11:00 – 11:30

State Representatives 11:30 – 12:30

1. Please RSVP by **[date and time]**, so that we can finalize arrangements and distribute publicity for the forum. We will list the candidates invited and indicate whether they are attending, not attending or no response received.

- **If you plan to attend, complete the *Participation Agreement*** at the bottom and email the document to **[name and email]**.
- **If you do not plan to attend,** please email your reply to **[name and email]**.

2. **Candidates invited to participate in the forum:**

- All candidates who will appear on the ballot for the above contested races are invited.
- Only candidates will be allowed to participate, and no substitute may stand in for a candidate at the forum, either to read a statement or to distribute candidate literature.

[If the forum is subject to rules prohibiting participation by a single candidate for an office, include a statement like one of the following:]

- **Note to candidates for U.S. Congress:** LWV policies and Federal Election Commission regulations require that in a forum for candidates for U.S. office, at least two candidates in a race must participate; otherwise, a single candidate in a U.S. race can only be introduced at a forum but not speak or answer questions. Candidates for U.S. office will be notified if they are the only candidate in the race who has agreed to participate.
- LWV policies require that at least two candidates in each race must participate in this forum; otherwise, a single candidate in a race can only be introduced at a

forum but not speak or answer questions. Candidates will be notified if they are the only candidate in the race who has agreed to participate.

3. **Unopposed candidates invited to be introduced:**

- Unopposed candidates may **not** be speakers at the forum; however, they may be introduced during the forum and are invited to the Meet & Greet.

4. **Sessions:**

- Candidates should arrive at least 10 minutes prior to their respective session.
- Candidate literature should be placed on tables provided at the back of the room. It may not be placed on seats or handed out to attendees as they enter or leave the room for the forum. Only small items are permitted in the room (e.g., cards, brochures, flyers), not large signs or banners.
- All candidates will be seated by office sought, in an order determined by a random draw *[or other method]*. Speaking order will be rotated.
- Each candidate will have up to **three minutes for opening remarks**, in the order seated.
- Written questions from the audience will be read by the moderator and each candidate for the office addressed will have up to **one minute to respond**. The speaking order of candidates will rotate.
- Each candidate will have up to **two minutes for closing remarks**, in the reverse order from opening remarks.
- Candidates may not address questions or remarks to other candidates; all questions will come from the audience.
- All candidates are invited to attend the Meet-and-Greet to talk individually to attendees and distribute campaign materials.

5. **QUESTIONS?** Contact *[name, email, telephone]*.

PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT: I agree to participate in the Candidate Forum *[date]* and accept the format and rules as presented above. The forum content is the property of the League of Women Voters of *[your League]* and permission must be sought to rebroadcast the forum in its entirety or to print excerpts. I agree that I will not use any portion of the forum in a political advertisement.

Candidate's name _____ Date _____

Sample Moderator Script

Nonpartisanship policy:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan organization, encourages informed and active participation of all citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

If forum is an open meeting under Texas Open Meetings Act:

The *[governmental body]* has determined that this forum is an open meeting under the Texas Open Meetings Act. *[Minutes or recording]* of this forum will be available *[when and where]*. Members of the audience are also allowed to tape or record the meeting in an unobtrusive manner.

Taping policy if forum is not an open meeting:

Before I introduce the candidates, please put away your cell phones and cameras. According to League guidelines, candidate forums cannot be taped or broadcast without permission of the League. No portion of the candidate forum may be used as part of campaign materials.

Format of session:

This session will present the candidates for *[specify offices]*. *[(Describe term and responsibilities of each office and introduce the candidates, including any unopposed candidates in the audience.)]*

[If you anticipate any requests from the audience regarding format or procedures, you may say the following:] In order to ensure that you have the most time to hear from the candidates running to represent you, we have established the format, time and terms for this forum together. All candidates have agreed in advance to the following format. *[Include any specific parts of the format that may be problematic.]*

To begin, each candidate will have up to **3** minutes for opening remarks. After that they will respond to written questions from the audience. Then each candidate will have **2** minutes for closing remarks.

All candidate remarks will be timed, to ensure equal opportunity for everyone. Our timekeeper is *[name]* a member of our League. Candidates, she will raise signs to let you know how much time is left. Please stop promptly when your time is up.

The program has a form on which members of the audience may submit a question for our Q&A period. As you listen to the candidates, you may write a question on the form and pass it to the aisle for one of the League members to pick up. Hold up your hand if you need another form or a pencil. Please write questions for an office, rather than an individual. Questions will be screened for appropriateness and grouped by topic.

Candidates' opening remarks:

The candidates are seated, left to right, in the order in which they will give opening remarks. *[Describe how order was determined.]* Each candidate will have up to **3 minutes**, beginning with *[name of first candidate]*.

[Announce the name of each candidate in turn.]

Questions and answers:

We have collected several questions from the audience. Each candidate will have the opportunity to respond to each question. We will vary the speaking order to allow different candidates to speak first, last, etc.

The first question is ... We will give each candidate **1 minute** to respond, beginning with *[name of candidate]*. *[It is helpful to provide candidates with a list of the speaking order for each question.]*

Candidates' closing remarks:

Each candidate will now have **2 minutes** for closing remarks. Candidates, you may want to address any issues that have come up during the questions.

This time we are going to go in reverse order from the opening remarks, beginning with *[name of first candidate]*.

End of Session

This concludes this session of our candidate forum. Thank you to the candidates for your participation and to the audience for your attendance and questions. Please check your program for information about *Voters Guides*, voting dates and sample ballots. *[If multiple sessions]* We will have a break during which time you can talk to candidates individually. We will begin the next session promptly at *[time]*.

Sample Candidate Forum Memorandum of Understanding

Candidate Forum Deliverables

1. In order to perform its obligations in producing and hosting the Candidate Forum, the Parties agree to the following terms, conditions, and deliverables:

- a) The Partners agree to jointly produce and broadcast a Candidate Forum focusing on candidates for the following contested elected office(s)_____. The Forum will be held on _____.
- b) The sponsors of the Forum are _____. No other sponsors shall be acknowledged. Only sponsor logos will be permitted in collateral materials. League of Women Voters of (League) will be recognized as the event's originating sponsor.
- c) Media sponsors shall arrange for the Forum to be broadcast live on the following media: _____. Abridged clips of the Forum will be permitted for news broadcast content. The League will be allowed to share this feed via its social media at no cost. This event will be open to all media.
- d) Media sponsors, if invited to moderate, shall ensure that the moderator(s) refrain from any partisan conduct or statements in emceeing and moderating the forum.
- e) Prior to inviting any Forum candidates, the partners shall establish and use objective non-partisan criteria to determine which candidates officially qualify for election to this office and shall extend invitation to all qualifying candidates for the Forum. This criteria should also address the possibility of write-in candidates for office.
- f) No individuals except qualified candidates for (name office being contested) shall be allowed to participate in this Forum.
- g) All partners shall jointly determine the candidate Forum format, provided it complies with relevant state and federal law (FEC, IRS) as well as voter education activities.
- h) All partners agree to refrain from collecting any personal data from attendees or sponsor organizations' membership database.
- i) The Parties shall not provide Forum questions to any candidate in advance. The League will determine the boundaries of topics which will be covered by the Forum. The League will also provide qualified volunteers to properly screen and edit questions from the audience for the candidates. No questions may be offered from the floor for quality control of time and content.
- j) The Parties shall use commercially reasonable efforts, excluding commencing litigation, to prevent the Forum, or any portion or recorded media thereof, from being used for any partisan or political activity by any third-party.
- k) The Parties shall be recognized with the following language in all promotion(s), broadcast(s) or rebroadcast(s) of the Forum or a portion thereof: "This

Candidate Forum is made possible by the financial support of the League of Women Voters of (League) and (name partners).”

- I) The Parties shall provide the following as sponsors of the Candidate Forum:
 - i) _____ will provide the venue and associated costs: A/V, lighting, technicians.
 - ii) _____ will contact the candidates, outline specifics, appoint points of contact, confirm participation and share logistics details.
 - iii) _____ will handle security and coordinate with local law enforcement if needed. (This information should be shared with candidate teams.)
 - iv) (Media Partner) will provide no less than ___ promotional prints in their newspaper, promotion on their website as well as social media platforms, and an emcee/moderator, and will live web stream and archive the event for post-event access by the public.
 - v) (Media Partner) will promote the event in advance with pre-event interview considerations, calendar listings in print and on social media; the event will be free and open to the public.
 - vi) All partners will work in concert to market the event up to four weeks in advance of the date.

Sample Video/Photograph Release Form

League of Women Voters of [Your League] Video/Photograph Release Form

I hereby grant the League of Women Voter of [Your League] (the "League") the irrevocable right and permission to use photographs and/or video recordings of me on League and other websites and in publications, promotional flyers, educational materials, derivative works, or for any other similar purpose without compensation to me.

I understand and agree that such photographs and/or video recordings of me may be placed on the Internet. I also understand and agree that I may be identified by name and/or title in printed, Internet or broadcast information that might accompany the photographs and/or video recordings of me. I waive the right to approve the final product. I agree that all such portraits, pictures, photographs, video and audio recordings, and any reproductions thereof, and all plates, negatives, recording tape and digital files are and shall remain the property of the League.

I hereby release, acquit and forever discharge the League from any and all claims, demands, rights, promises, damages and liabilities arising out of or in connection with the use or distribution of said photographs and/or video recordings, including but not limited to any claims for invasion of privacy, appropriation of likeness or defamation.

I hereby warrant that I am eighteen (18) years old or more and competent to contract in my own name or, if I am less than eighteen years old, that my parent or guardian has signed this release form below. This release is binding on me and my heirs, assigns and personal representatives.

Signature of Individual Photographed/Recorded

Date

Printed Name of Individual Photographed/Recorded

Signature of Witness

Date

If an individual photographed/recorded is under eighteen (18) years old, the following section must be completed: I have read and I understand this document. I understand and agree that it is binding on me, my child (named above), our heirs, assigns and personal representatives. I acknowledge that I am eighteen (18) years old or more and that I am the parent or guardian of the child named above.

Signature of Parent/Guardian of Individual Photographed/Recorded

Date

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian

Signature of Witness

Date