

VOTER SERVICE

I. Statewide Voter Guide

- A. LWVO/LWVOEF is responsible for collecting and posting, on Vote411, an electronic voter guide for all statewide races and statewide ballot issues in primary and general elections.
- B. Offices included in the guide include Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Auditor of State, Secretary of State, Treasurer of State, U.S. Senator, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio, and Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio. Candidate questions are developed by the State Board, the Lobby Corps in consultation with the Mission Impact Committee and approved by the State Board.
- C. Information about ballot issues should include 1) the proposed language, 2) a simple summary of the measure, and 3) League pros and cons. The latter two items are prepared by the Lobby Corps and the Mission Impact Committee and approved by the State Board.
- D. The voter guide information is also published on the LWVO website and on any national services available (e.g., Vote411).
- E. Inclusion of Candidates in Voter Guides/Voter Information Bulletins. (Updated Nov. 2018): LWVOEF makes every effort to include statewide candidates in the voter guides produced prior to primary and general elections.

All candidates certified by the filing deadline, who have a complete mailing address available through the Ohio Secretary of State's office or County Board of Elections shall be sent a candidate questionnaire with deadline information via email or U.S. mail, if an email is not available.

All candidates are expected to adhere to the written deadline for receipt of responses in order to be included in any hard copy or electronic version of the voter guide. All candidates are expected to adhere to the policies regarding signature on form and word limits.

In the event of a write-in candidate for statewide office, the LWVO/LWVOEF – upon the initiative of that candidate – will forward a copy of the candidate questionnaire to that candidate and include their responses in any hard copy or electronic version of the voter guide produced, **AS LONG AS THE RESPONSE IS RECEIVED BY THE STATED DEADLINE.** Nothing in this policy shall be construed to indicate that the LWVO/LWVOEF will initiate contact with the write-in candidate in order to include them in the voter guide.

If any candidate (certified or write-in) response is received after the stated deadline, the LWVO/LWVOEF is under no obligation to include the candidate in the voter guide. The

LWVO/LWVOEF shall make reasonable attempts to remind candidates of the deadline for receipt of completed questionnaires.

II. Coordination of Local League Voter Guides

- A. LWVO/LWVOEF is responsible for assigning responsibility to Local Leagues for collecting voter guide information for all regional races in primary and general elections.
- B. Offices included in regional races include U.S. Representative, Ohio Senator, Ohio Representative, Judge of the Ohio Court of Appeals, and Member of the State Board of Education.
- C. Questions for these candidates are developed by the LWVO Advocacy Committee with consultation of the Lobby Corps and approved by the State Board. Local Leagues must, at a minimum, pose these questions to the candidates, but they may pose additional questions of their own choosing.
- D. The instructions and assignments sent to Local Leagues include clear information about how Local Leagues are to share information with one another and handle county-wide races that may overlap League boundaries. Local Leagues are also instructed to publish the guides on any national services available.

III. Debates/Forum Policy (revised 11.09)

- A. **The LWVO/LWVOEF is a non-partisan organization** that neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for public office. Any participation in debates is meant for purely informational purposes and should not be construed as supporting any candidate or party. For more information on the LWVO's non-partisan position, please see the LWVO's Non-Partisan Policy.
- B. **LWVO/LWVOEF host candidate debates/forums** for Ohio Governor, Lt. Governor, Treasurer, Auditor, Secretary of State, and Ohio Supreme Court candidates as well as federal Senate candidates. Local Leagues may host candidate debates for all other races, including but not limited to U.S. Representative Candidates, Ohio House and Senate candidates, county officials, county and municipal judges, mayoral candidates, and other local officials. When Local Leagues host candidate events with state level candidates, they must abide by LWVO/LWVOEF guidelines and coordinate with LWVO/LWVOEF.
- C. **Local Leagues may also host debates and forums on local ballot issues.** Local Leagues may host debates and forums on statewide issues in coordination with LWVO/LWVOEF.

- D. **This debate/forum policy is offered as informational guidance** for LWVO/LWVOEF and Local Leagues on issues that may arise in the course of educating voters through debates and forums. It is not intended to be legal advice, and if any legal questions do arise, it is best to seek the advice of an attorney.
- E. **Debates and Forums.** The FEC defines a debate as an event that (i) includes at least two candidates, (ii) is staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another, and (iii) allows the candidates to appear concurrently, in face-to-face confrontations with opportunities to respond to each other.
- a. Because a debate involving candidates for state or federal office, may be considered an “in-kind contribution” the LWVO shall cancel any debate of candidates for state or federal office where only one candidate is present.
 - b. Empty Chair Debates. Because a debate involving candidates for state or federal office, may be considered an “in-kind contribution” LWVO/LWVOEF shall cancel any debate of candidates for state or federal office where only one candidate is present.
LWVO/LWVOEF recommends that Local Leagues cancel debates for local office where only one candidate is present in order to avoid violating the policy of non-partisanship.

One alternative to cancelling an event is to employ the speed dating format. For more information on how to put on this kind of candidate event consult:
https://my.lwv.org/sites/default/files/leagues/wysiwyg/%5Bcurrent-user%3Aog-user-node%3A1%3Atitle%5D/speed_dating_toolbox.pdf.
 - c. Ballot issues. Educational forums and debates on ballot issues on which LWVO/LWVOEF has not taken a position must not favor one side or the other on the issue and may be funded by either the operating fund or the education fund (501c3). Ballot issue forums/debates on ballot issues on which LWVO/LWVOEF has a position and which LWVO/LWVOEF is advocating for the public to take action must be funded solely by the operating fund.
- F. **Practices.** LWVOEF believes that clear policies and roles in LWVO/LWVOEF-sponsored debates/forums are essential to ensure that its goals are achieved. Therefore, LWVO/LWVOEF has established the following procedures:
- a. Partnership/Co-Sponsoring Debates. In any cooperative venture between LWVO/LWVOEF and another entity, the conditions of such cooperation shall be agreed to in writing before any negotiations with candidates/campaigns take place. The Board must approve in advance any commitment.
 - b. Roles. It is the responsibility of the Board to approve LWVO/LWVOEF involvement in any debates/forums. The role of Debate Coordinator can be fulfilled by a volunteer or staff member, and he/she shall work closely with the President. The Debate Coordinator or her/his designee shall serve as the official spokesperson for LWVO/LWVOEF.

- c. Documents of the Event. All press releases, marketing materials, formal correspondence to campaigns/candidates, and other information shall originate from the LWVO/LWVOEF office, unless they are created by a partner in which case, they should be approved by LWVO/LWVOEF before distribution.
 - d. Criteria:
 - i. The LWVO/LWVOEF shall review/revise the Debate Criteria every two years, preferably in years where there are no statewide elections.
 - ii. Such criteria shall be promptly disseminated to all parties and to all candidates/campaigns as soon as they are identified.
 - iii. We believe much of this policy is applicable to co-sponsored events on all topics.
 - e. A letter to candidates/campaigns needs to include criteria for participation, debate rules, release policy, and waiver for League distribution of debate content, acknowledgment that debate content is the property of LWVO/LWVOEF and that permission must be sought to rebroadcast the debate in its entirety or to print excerpts. Candidates/campaigns must agree that they will not use any portion of the debate in a political advertisement. Date and subject of all other communications with the candidates/campaigns should be logged.
 - f. General Election Debate Criteria. LWVO/LWVOEF will use the following criteria to issue invitations to debate to candidates/campaigns in the general election.
 - g. Any candidate who is on the ballot by the date of the debate is eligible to participate, AND
 - h. Any candidates with a formal campaign being waged. (such as, but not limited to, the presence of campaign staff, headquarters, position papers and campaign appearances), AND
 - i. A candidate must demonstrate significant voter interest and support. (such as, reliable, nonpartisan, public opinion polls of at least 3-10%, significant fundraising support, significant media coverage, or representing a political party that gathered at least 3% percent or more voter support in the previous election.
 - j. Criteria for eligibility should be tailored to the race and decided before invitations are sent out. The criteria for eligibility use viewpoint-neutral criteria to determine candidate participation. The burden rests with the candidate to make a showing of compliance with these criteria. League will exercise its “good faith judgment” in applying criteria.
 - k. Any moderator selected for the forum/debate should have training or experience in moderating, understand and agree to abide by League practices, and should have no personal or professional relationship with any of the candidates/campaigns/parties running which are included in the forum/debate.
- G. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).** LWVO/LWVOEF embraces the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in member events, public events, and partnership activities. All debates and forums should be held in locations that are accessible. Members should use spaces that are

welcoming to people of all identities, and preference should be given to locations that have access to transit and free parking. Questions asked by the candidates/campaigns should be sought from a wide range of socio-economic perspectives and partnership with diverse organizations is encouraged.

- H. **Date selection.** Great care needs to be taken in selecting the dates of forums/debates to ensure fairness to all candidates/campaigns as well as to maximize public participation. Select dates well in advance that will accommodate the candidates/campaigns, the site, and partners. For a particular debate or forum with incumbents consider the conflicts with ongoing duties of that elected office in date selection. Major religious/cultural holidays should be avoided as much as possible. Avoid other organizations' meeting dates (e.g., city council, board of education, civic groups).

- I. **Rules for the audience.** In advance of the debate, prepare rules/expectations for the audience that can assist in setting a productive atmosphere. Such rules should be announced in advance, and you may want to also provide them in writing or through signage. Cell phones should be turned off and no audience member may record the event, given that the FCC requires that a debate must be broadcast in its entirety, either live or reasonably soon after it takes place. Other rules for consideration include, but are not limited to, when to allow the audience to clap, whether audience members can hold signs, and if/where campaign materials can be distributed.

- J. **Insurance.** When planning an event, consider whether there is adequate insurance coverage, whether that is through the League, a co-sponsor, or the facility where the event is being held.