

## 2. Media Panel (Newspaper, Radio, TV Reporters) Asks The Questions

League member serves as moderator. Opening statements are made by all candidates with the speaking order determined by lots; closing statements are made in reverse order from opening statements. Questions will be written on cards distributed when audience members enter the debate area. Questions are vetted by League members and possibly by others agreed upon by the candidates. The source of the questions can be the League, the media and the audience, and should be identified as such. All candidates have the opportunity to answer all questions and the panel is usually limited to no more than four. There is a timekeeper.

## 3. The “Cumulative Time” Debate

Each candidate has a total time allotment, e.g., 25 minutes, exclusive of time for opening and closing statements. This format promotes interchange between candidates, allowing them to decide how much time to spend on any particular issue. They can hold each other accountable while keeping audience interest. Each round of questioning is initiated by the moderator. The same question is addressed to each candidate before debate between or among them. Candidates take turns being the first to answer a question.

A timekeeper assigned to each candidate times her or him. Cumulative time is kept for each. All timekeepers hold up signs indicating the amount of time used by each candidate. The moderator and candidates see how their time usage compares, and can self-moderate to balance significant discrepancies. The candidates who are behind in time used can avail themselves of the opportunity to use more time. This format encourages a candidate to respond briefly on a topic deemed to be less important or on which there is no disagreement and to use more time to discuss more fully issues considered more important.

Candidates are encouraged to debate and hold each other to account rather than having this role assumed by the moderator. The moderator simply reminds the candidates of the clock and moves to another question when the topic appears exhausted. Candidates may not save up time during the questioning to make a speech at the end. A two-minute closing statement may be permitted under this format.

All debate formats should allow equal time and be fair to all candidates.

Sources: *FAQ's Candidate Forums-Debates-LWVUS*;  
*Guidelines for Debates and Forums LWNYS*;  
LWVH Voter Services Committee  
Approved by the LWVH Board, September 2011  
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# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE HAMPTONS **GUIDELINES** For Participation in Candidate Debates

## The Purpose of League-Sponsored Debates and Forums

1. To educate the public about the issues in the campaigns
2. To provide an opportunity for voters to hear candidates discuss those issues face-to-face
3. To stimulate public interest and participation in the elections
4. To provide an opportunity for the public to engage their candidates

The League believes these purposes are best served by adoption of nonpartisan, objective, and understandable written criteria for candidate inclusion. To that end, the League will apply the following guidelines in determining whether candidates have the right to participate in League sponsored debates and forums.

## Guidelines for Candidate Participation

1. **Constitutional eligibility:** The candidate must meet the requirements of the NYS Constitution and the Constitution of the United States.
2. **Ballot Access:** The candidate must meet all requirements to be on the ballot according to NYS Election laws.<sup>1</sup>
3. **Financial Compliance:** The candidate must show that all financial reports required by the NYS Board of Elections have been filed and verified.
4. **Demonstration of significant voter interest and support** by meeting one of these two requirements:
  - The candidate seeks to be (in the case of a primary election) or is the candidate of a party, as that term is defined in section 1-104(3)<sup>2</sup> of New York State Election Law
  - The candidate can demonstrate significant statewide interest and support, as by:
    - a) Evidence that a formal statewide campaign is being waged; e.g., presence of headquarters, campaign staff, issuance of position papers, campaign

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1) When ballot access has not been certified by the New York State Board of Elections, whether because the date for certification has not yet arrived or because a legal challenge of one or more candidates has delayed certification, the League shall exercise its judgment about which candidates to invite and may invite any candidate whom it believes has a reasonable possibility of obtaining ballot access.

2) When the ballot has not yet been certified by the New York State Board of Elections, whether because the date for certification has not yet arrived or because a challenge to one or more candidates has delayed certification, the League shall exercise its good faith judgment about which candidates to invite and may invite any candidate whom it believes has a reasonable possibility of obtaining ballot access of a party.

appearances throughout the state, fundraising activities, etc.

b) Receipt of five percent of support in one or more current non-partisan statewide public opinion polls.

Based on the above criteria, a final determination of eligibility for participation will be made by the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Empty Chair Debates**

*U.S. Congressional Debates:* if a candidate is running for public office, you cannot hold a debate unless there are at least two candidates “face to face” (there cannot be a substitute for a candidate); therefore, with only one candidate you have no option but to cancel. Federal Election Commission (FEC) regulations state that this holds even if a candidate simply does not show up at the last minute. If we were to proceed with only one candidate for U.S. Congress, our nonpartisan status would be jeopardized.

*State and Local Debates:* If a candidate is running for the NYS legislature or for town/city office, the above rules do not apply unless you are planning to hold your debate at a television studio. Television comes under Federal Communications Commission (FCC) guidelines and you will need to learn from the television station if it can proceed with only one candidate.

In the case of a debate when there are three or more candidates (for example, in a Town Board contest), and one is unable to participate, then a League member can read a two-minute statement submitted by the absent candidate.

In the case of a debate involving only two candidates, both of whom have agreed to participate, if one does not appear at the last minute, the remaining candidate can make a three- to-five minute statement, but there will be no opportunity for questions. In the case of a debate involving only two candidates when one declines to participate, that particular debate will be canceled.

### **In the Case of an Election When the Candidate is Unopposed**

#### *Federal Level Races*

A debate may NOT be held. Both the Federal Election Commission (FEC) and Federal Communication Commission (FCC) rules define a debate as more than one candidate.

If an unopposed candidate were to appear at an LWV candidate forum, it could be interpreted as a contribution to that candidate and jeopardize the League’s 501(c) (3) status and nonpartisanship reputation.

FCC regulations also preclude broadcast coverage of only one candidate. Instead, unopposed candidates might be invited to meet and greet attendees at the end of another candidate debate or contribute a statement to the Voters’ Guide.

#### *Local Races*

Candidates will be invited to meet and greet attendees at the end of another candidate debate and/or contribute a statement to the League of Women Voters of the Hamptons Voters’ Guide (e.g., VOTE411.org)

### **Debate Co-Sponsorship Guidelines**

It is important that the League of Women Voters of New York State maintain its nonpartisan position when co-sponsoring a debate. The first step in agreeing to co-sponsorship is to review the other organization’s mission statement to ensure that its goals are consistent with those of the League.

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

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

### **Possible Formats for Candidate Debates**

#### 1. League Member Serves As Moderator

Moderator manages the debate and asks the questions. Opening statements are made by all candidates with the order of speaking determined by lots. Closing statements are made in reverse order from opening statements. Questions will be written on cards distributed when audience members enter the debate area. Written questions can be given directly to the moderator or League members can screen the questions to avoid embarrassing, non-answerable or duplicative questions.

This procedure allows all who wish to ask questions to do so without risking disruption. It has the added advantage of the moderator having questions in hand to repeat accurately, if necessary. There is a timekeeper. (See later for details.)