

## **League of Women Voters of Illinois**

### **Voter Service: Candidate Participation Policy**

The League of Women Voters of Illinois does not support or oppose any political party or candidate. The purpose of candidate forums and debates is to allow voters an opportunity to hear candidates discuss issues face-to-face, to stimulate public interest in the campaign, and to provide the candidates an opportunity to engage with their constituents.

After careful consideration, the League of Women Voters of Illinois (LWVIL) has adopted criteria that are nonpartisan, capable of objective application, and understandable to both candidate and the public.

All candidates who meet the following criteria will be invited to participate in Illinois Leagues' Voter Service activities.

#### **For Inclusion in Any League Voter Guide and League Materials**

In determining eligibility under the criteria, the burden of proof is on the candidate. In order to have information in any League voter guide and League materials, a candidate must meet the following criteria:

1. Must be a legally qualified candidate for public office.
2. Must have publicly announced an intention to run for office.
3. Must be eligible under the applicable local, state or federal laws to hold the office sought.
4. Must be qualified to be on the ballot.
5. Must be legally qualified by the deadline that has been established for response.

#### **For Participation in Candidate Forums/Debates**

The above criteria will also apply for a candidate invited to a General Election Forum/Debate with these additions:

1. The candidate must win the primary election for his/her respective party for the office which is the subject of the forum/debate or be officially nominated by his/her political party for that office.
2. For a candidate who has obtained ballot status as an independent or third-party candidate, the candidate must show evidence that a formal campaign is being waged. The existence of a public website, campaign office, campaign staff, campaign appearances, position papers, and fundraising are examples.

#### **Additional Forum/Debate Policy Information When Only One Candidate Agrees To Participate**

LWVIL is a nonpartisan, political nonprofit organization that strives to protect citizens' voting rights and deliver unbiased education to voters. This policy is adopted, in part, in response to voters' concerns about Leagues not having events or being forced to cancel events, due to candidates' unwillingness to participate. In addition, this portion of the policy is based on an understanding of applicable legal

requirements and reflects the changing climate of our political discourse, including the growing demand from voters for direct access to candidates and substantive discussion of issues.

**Definitions:**

**Debate:** The Federal Election Commission (FEC) defines a debate as an event that includes at least two candidates; is staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another; and allows the candidates to appear concurrently, in face-to-face confrontations, with opportunities to respond to each other.

**Forum:** A format other than a debate (as defined above) is an event in which ideas and views on issues are exchanged. LWV Candidate Forums traditionally involve questions submitted by the audience, after reviewed by question-sorters and read to the candidate(s) by a LWV-trained moderator. The candidates are allowed to respond to the questions, in a predetermined timeframe, and are not to engage with each other.

**Criteria for holding candidate forum/debates are dependent on the type of office a candidate is seeking. This is to clarify the former “empty chair” policy.**

**Federal Offices:** When one or more candidates for federal office (US Senator, US Representative) is on the ballot and only one candidate chooses to attend LWVIL’s forum/debate, then no candidate for that office will be permitted to appear. This is in accordance with Federal Election Commission (FEC) rules and regulations. Although no candidate forum/debate may be held, LWVIL can nevertheless use an action campaign or publicity efforts to notify the public of a candidate’s unwillingness to participate.

In the context of a primary, at least two opposing candidates for the same political party nomination must agree to participate or the forum/debate will not take place.

**State Legislative, County, Township, and Local Offices:** If only one candidate in a contested state legislative, county, township or local election is willing to participate, a candidate forum (not a debate) may take place only under the following conditions:

1. No commercial media are broadcasting the forum. Under Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations, any broadcaster or cablecaster that permits a candidate for any public office to use its facilities must provide all other legally qualified candidates for the same office with equal time. Public access channels are not required to abide by this regulation.
2. League Education Fund money can be spent on League-sponsored candidate forum. It is important that the League’s nonpartisanship policy applies to the League-sponsored candidate forum.
3. Every effort has been made to arrange a forum that is suitable to the schedules of the candidates. The League will avoid any appearance of partisanship. The League will notify the press that invitations been sent to all competing candidates. The League will maintain a detailed record of communications with candidates, including corresponding in writing with the candidate concerning invitations to appear a forums, attempts to accommodate each candidate’s schedule, confirmation of scheduled forum appearances, confirmation of the cancellation of a forum appearance, and attempts, if any, to reschedule a cancelled appearance.

4. If the League decides to go ahead with a forum when one of the candidates does not respond or accept an invitation to the forum, or when a candidate accepts but does not appear at the forum, the LWV moderator will announce that the absent person(s) is a candidate for that office. The moderator will present the factual reasons (if any) given by the candidate who is not present, without any editorial comment. **No substitutes** will be permitted to take the place of a candidate, nor will the moderator read any statements of the absent candidate's views. However, the moderator may read a very brief statement by the candidate of the reason(s) for the candidate's absence.
5. In conducting a single candidate forum, the League will maintain the already established forum format. The League must prevent the forum from giving the appearance of being a League sponsored rally for the only candidate attending the forum. Therefore: the moderator and/or other panelists must ask nonpartisan questions; the length of the candidate's response must be limited; the moderator and/or other panelists must ask probing questions and follow-up questions.
6. If there is a candidate forum, the Candidate Participation Policy Broadcast Agreement applies. This states that "no voice, image or other duplication of the forum may be used by any candidate's representative or campaign in any campaign advertising." This Agreement must be signed in advance by the candidate or his/her representative. A copy of the Agreement is available on LWVIL website under Resources for Leaders, Voter Service Chairs.

#### **Sponsorship of Statewide Candidate Forums/Debates**

The LWVIL and/or LWVIL Education Fund reserve the right to contact the candidates for statewide office (US Senator and Illinois Constitutional offices) for the purpose of securing their participation in candidates' debates and other Voter Service activities. **Local Leagues are encouraged to have forums/debates for United State Congressional races and to work with neighboring Leagues when districts overlap.**

Local Leagues **must contact** the LWVIL President or LWVIL Vice President/Voter Service Chair for permission to contact any statewide candidate. Permission is determined on a case-by-case basis. The two reasons for this are (1) to avoid competition among local Leagues and (2) to eliminate confusing requests to the candidates.

**Local Leagues are reminded that LWVIL takes the initiative for scheduling forums/debates for US Senator and Illinois Constitutional offices (Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer, and Comptroller).**

Approved by motion of the LWVIL Board of Directors\_May 11, 2017