

## VOTER SERVICE NUTS & BOLTS

### PLANNING CANDIDATE FORUMS

- Take the lead in planning candidate forums. The League is viewed as the “expert” and most organizations welcome this arrangement.
- Work with co-sponsors who are also nonpartisan and do not endorse candidates. This carries over to newspapers that endorse candidates. If the endorsement will precede your forum, the newspaper should not be a co-sponsor.
- Select your moderator early and invite that person to be involved in the planning. Trade moderators with a neighboring League to avoid any appearance of bias or partisanship.
- Choose a format that will help voters make an electoral decision and put the candidates on record so they can be held accountable.
- Have candidate criteria for participation in place before invitations are issued (see Face to Face, LWVUS publication #830, 1996, and Guidelines to Developing a Candidate Participation Policy, LWVIL President’s Handbook, Voter Service).
- Obtain local League board approval for the format and other procedures worked out by your committee in consultation with your voter service chair.
- Observe legal requirements of the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for debates (see Face to Face, page 10; see also LWVIL Board Approved May 2017 Voter Service Candidate Participation Policy).
- A debate must include at least two candidates for the office. A candidate forum is where there is only one candidate. Both debate and forum are described in May 2017 LWVIL Voter Service Candidate Participation Policy.
- Candidates in a debate must appear concurrently, in face to face confrontation.
- LWVIL has the sole responsibility to contact statewide candidates to arrange debates.
- Local Leagues are responsible for contacting candidates for all other levels of government.
- Do not mix levels of government in the same event unless the event is separated by a break between the two debates/forums. Keep the number of candidates manageable when you decide which races to undertake.
- Debates should address a broad range of issues. If the co-sponsors decide to limit the range of issues, be sure they are still reasonably broad.

### **Special request to local Leagues for moderator names:**

The state League office receives many requests for help identifying moderators. Please suggest moderators from your League who would be willing to travel a reasonable distance to provide this service for another League or organization seeking a moderator.

You may call Mary Schaafsma, Executive Director, at the League office (312/939-5935 x33) with names.

## **PROTECT THE LEAGUE'S NONPARTISAN STANCE!!**

- Your local League Nonpartisan/Political Action Policy should encourage awareness of how others are likely to view your actions when you represent the League. This can save the League the painful experience of accusations and a wave of “bad press,” not to mention the difficulty of trying to regain your credibility once lost.
- Review your local Political Action Policy and approve prior to any candidate forums.
- Political activity is restricted during the term of office for local League presidents, voter service chairs and any other board members or local League members identified by your League prior to each election as “high visibility.”
- Guard against actions that the public may perceive as showing favoritism to a particular candidate or party:
  - ✓ Don't sign petitions supporting a candidate or solicit contributions from individuals, and don't allow such activities at League meetings or events.
  - ✓ Avoid high visibility actions if you are the president or voter service chair for your League. Don't let your name be used in publicity or letter to the newspaper on a candidate's behalf. If pictures are taken at a League program, it's better not to send one of a League president and a candidate to the newspaper.
  - ✓ If you are identified as a high-visibility member, avoid putting signs in your yard or bumper stickers on your car supporting candidates or ballot issues on which the League has not taken a position.

## **VOTER REGISTRATION AND MEMBERSHIP BROCHURES**

When registering voters, there are two reasons why membership brochures should not be on display.

1. If a voter registration campaign, debate, candidate forum or any other election event is held under the umbrella of the LWVIL or LWVUS Education Funds, membership brochures should not be easily available. Under IRS regulations, the Education Fund is designated as a 501(c)(3) and the League organization that has members is a 501(c)(4). Since the (c)(3) has no members, anything to do with membership will look like support for the (c)(4). The LWVIL and its Education Fund were audited twice in recent years and the IRS looks for this kind of intermingling of funds.
2. Under Illinois law, researched by Mary Lou Aagaard, former LWVIL Election Laws Specialist, League may not have the brochures out at registration. The statute reads, “No deputy registrar shall engage in any electioneering or the promotion of any cause during the performance of his/her duties.” When I asked how that was interpreted, Mary Lou called a friend at the State Board of Elections, who agreed that the League's conservative interpretation is correct. The SBE person also stated that groups promoting mail-in registration also may not promote their organization.

### **Acceptable Recruitment Options You Should Exercise:**

1. You can offer a membership brochure when asked about joining.
2. You can have a sign-up sheet for further information about the League.
3. You can set up a separate table (not the other end of the registration table!) for member recruitment, manned with enthusiastic volunteers, and give out information about voting and the League.