



FORUMS IN A BOX

A Toolkit for Local Organizers

August 2022

Planning and Conducting Candidate and Issue Forums
in Conjunction with the League of Women Voters



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Forums in a Box Toolkit for Local Organizers has been developed to help community organizations partner with the League of Women Voters to conduct candidate and issue forums in local communities. This toolkit is also designed to offer guidance to Local League chapters organizing candidate and issue forums in their area.

As we blocked out the Forum in a Box Toolkit we identified two distinct roles. Not all candidates or issues forums will have these separate roles, but we wanted to provide a tool that highlighted the varying roles that individuals and organizations often play in creating such public events.

- The League of Women Voters provides the expertise of conducting the event and provides the moderator. LWVME may alternatively help identify and brief other community members in fulfilling this role. LWVME can also co-sponsor forums and promote them to League members and through LWVME's website, email lists, and social media.
- A local organization takes on the responsibilities for the logistics of a local forum or candidates night.

Building on excellent resources developed in other states, most notably Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, and those of the League of Women Voters United States, this handbook provides a basic outline of the process and helpful hints to plan and conduct successful forums.

We invite you to join with the League of Women Voters and this Forums in a Box Toolkit to bring alive political candidate and issue campaigns to the benefit of your own community.

Anne B. Schink
2012

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GETTING STARTED

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

Guidelines for Forums in a Box

Expectations for Local Organizers

Candidate/Issue Forum Checklist for Local Organizers

GUIDELINES FOR FORUMS IN A BOX

This toolkit is designed for groups who want to organize local forums for candidates and on public policy issues.

- For issue forums, the format is designed so that the League of Women Voters arranges for the speaker on a topic, the suggested ground rules, and a sample format. The League of Women Voters also provides names of moderators.
- For candidate events, the League of Women Voters can join with local organizers in contacting candidates, as well as providing a moderator and suggested ground rules and sample formats.

The local organization is responsible for the logistics of the actual event. The local organization is responsible for arranging for the site*, inviting the audience, and contacting the press. The desired length of a forum is 60 to 90 minutes for each race or issue.

**See PAGE 20 for a discussion of the pros and cons of virtual versus in-person forums and the logistics for virtual or hybrid forums.*

The League will provide:

- + Contact with speaker(s) or presenter(s) for issue forums
- + Joint contact with candidates for candidate forums
- + Moderator
- + Format
- + Ground rules
- + Sample questions (may be chosen in collaboration with the local organizers)

The local organizers will provide:

- + Location
- + Audience
- + Publicity

The success of any candidate or issue forum depends largely on the perception and implementation of a public event conducted with fairness and even-handedness. In cases where the League of Women Voters has a position supporting or opposing a particular issue, our policy requires that the League refrain from sponsoring an issue forum.

EXPECTATIONS FOR LOCAL ORGANIZERS OR CO-SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS

Planning in Advance

1.

Establish a budget

- + Develop a realistic budget to include all potential costs, such as facility rental, audio visual equipment, materials, travel reimbursements, security.
- + Determine which organization is responsible for which costs and who will raise the money.

 *Sketch out your sample budget.*

ITEM	COST
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
_____	\$ _____
TOTAL	\$ _____

2.

Logistics

- + The size and location of an appropriate site will depend on your community, your organization, and the politics of a particular issue.
- + Clarify with the site owner and your organization whether insurance is required for your event.
- + Identify and contract with appropriate meeting site.
 - › Check the site regarding meeting set-up. A physical site visit is always a good idea, whether or not the site and other sponsors indicate that it is a good choice.
 - › Clarify arrangement of speakers' table/podium/adequate lighting and audio system (microphone) if necessary.
 - › Ensure an adequate number of chairs in lecture style or circle.

 *For an in-person event, what locations are you considering?*

PLACE (address)

CONTACT INFO (phone or email)

3.

Designing a public relations campaign

- + Invite organizations to co-sponsor and grow your audience! If you are running a candidate forum, co-sponsors should not endorse nor oppose the candidates. This violates League policy (see PAGE 33).
 - › Announce the event to sponsor organizations and the public.
- + Announce the event in the press and on social networking sites.
 - › Inform the newspapers. Start early. Send announcements to any large daily newspaper, but also include the small regional weeklies and free newspapers serving local communities.
 - › Put it on Facebook and websites of sponsoring organizations.
- + Inform all members of sponsoring organizations in the area where the forum will be held.
- + Inform state and federal legislators who live in the area, as well as local town or city officials.
- + Place a notice on public community bulletin boards (such as MPBN).
- + Notify other organizations that maintain community calendars, such as radio and television stations.



League members can request communications support from the state. Depending on the needs of your event, you can request graphic designs (e.g. digital advertising and posters), media and press connections, help getting the word out, etc. [Click here for the request form](#) or visit bit.ly/LWVMEcommsRequest.

How do you want to promote your event? Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital ads (e.g. Facebook) | <input type="checkbox"/> Posters | <input type="checkbox"/> Television/Radio ads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flyers | <input type="checkbox"/> Postcards | <input type="checkbox"/> Email campaigns |

4.

Conducting the forum

- + Identify who is doing introductions — a representative of the League of Women Voters, the moderator or someone representing a sponsoring organization.
- + Provide water for the speakers, also notepads, and pens.
- + Procure index cards and golf pencils and time cards, along with banners and brochures.
- + Create table tents to identify the speakers.
- + Create a program or itinerary for the event.

Screening and organizing questions

- › Arrange for volunteers to collect and collate questions.
- › Arrange for timekeepers.

Who will fill the following rolls at your event?

MODERATOR: _____

QUESTION COLLECTOR: _____

TIMEKEEPER: _____

At the Event

1.

Logistics

- + Arrange with building security the procedures for opening and closing the building, or responding to security issues.
- + Provide directional signs to the meeting room from the parking lot and building entrance.
- + Display organizational banner or identifying poster.
- + Bring recruitment and informational materials from sponsoring organization and issue campaigns.
- + Bring index cards and golf pencils.
- + Set up table at entrance to room
 - › Display materials from organizations and presenters.
- + Ensure that microphones (if used) are live and working properly.
- + Ensure the recording device (if used) is streaming properly.
- + Provide water for speakers (no ice because it sometimes affects the voice of the speaker), also notepads and pens. Set up table tents.
- + Supply one or two timekeepers. Make sure the timer knows how long speakers have to speak and respond. Provide the time keepers with a meeting agenda.
- + One timekeeper keeps track of the time with a timer or stopwatch and a second person holds up the cards. White for 1 minute; yellow for 30 seconds left; red for stop.
- + Greet and welcome the candidates or speakers. Draw lots. Inform the moderator of the order drawn.

2.

Screening and organizing questions

- + Arrange for volunteers to collect and collate questions.
 - › If you are livestreaming to Facebook or Youtube, have someone keep an eye on the comments section for questions.
- + Arrange for a system for getting the questions from the sorters in the back of the room to the moderator in the front of the room. It is one good reason to have the moderator placed at the side of the room, rather than in the center of the presenter table.

3.

Wrap up and conclusion

- + Close up the event (clearing the room, ensuring that tables and chairs are returned to their proper places, and that materials are removed from the room).
- + If you livestreamed the event to Facebook or Youtube, these will automatically be archived online. If used a Zoom broadcast, the video can later be uploaded to the League's social media accounts, as well as the online voter database, Vote411.org.

CANDIDATE OR ISSUE FORUM CHECKLIST FOR LOCAL ORGANIZERS

General Planning (2-3 months ahead)



- Select choice of dates, times and facilities.
- Invite candidates and confirm forum date.
- Identify the media in your area: contact person, address, and phone number.

My event could take place on:
____/____/____ (D/M/Y) at ____:____ (TIME)
____/____/____ (D/M/Y) at ____:____ (TIME)
____/____/____ (D/M/Y) at ____:____ (TIME)

We invited the following candidates:

We have notified the following media:

Arrangements (2 months ahead)



- Determine date and time of meeting.
- Check proposed facilities for adequate size, cost, location, parking, podium, microphone, and other equipment.
- Confirm arrangements with facility in writing.
- Recruit people to host the event, sort questions, and act as timekeepers.
- Confirm arrangements with cosponsors.

My event will take place on:
____/____/____ (D/M/Y) at ____:____ (TIME)

Our event will be hosted at (address):

We received confirmation on (DATE):
____/____/____ (D/M/Y)

We confirmed people to help host the event:

MODERATOR: _____
QUESTION COLLECTOR: _____
TIMEKEEPER: _____

Our cosponsors will be:

Publicity (4 weeks ahead)

- Send letters of invitation to media.
- Arrange for newspaper photographer.
- Announce meeting in organization's newsletter.
- Draft press release; include League contact phone number.
- Print and distribute flyers.
- Arrange for League banner, signs, decorations, and flag.
- Invite local luminaries.
- Clip newspaper articles related to meeting.



League members can request communications support from the state. Depending on the needs of your event, you can request graphic designs (e.g. digital advertising and posters), media and press connections, help getting the word out, etc. [Click here for the request form](#) or visit: bit.ly/LWVMEcommsRequest.



Need help writing a press release? See PAGE 13 for instructions. See PAGE 27 for a sample.

Preparation (2-3 weeks ahead)

- Release pre-meeting publicity promoting attendance and encouraging citizens to vote.
- Confirm all arrangements.



Encourage voters to check out Vote411.org for information on their ballots and the candidates.

Hospitality (2 weeks ahead)

- Arrange appropriate refreshments and necessary supplies.
- Arrange water glasses, paper and pencils for candidates.
- Also prepare front tables, if used: tablecloths.
- Arrange press section and credentials.



My shopping list: what refreshments will be served?

At the Meeting

- Arrive one hour early. Check to see that arrangements are as requested.
- Hang banners and posters.
- Check audio and lighting.
- Greet League personnel, candidates, and press.
- See that the meeting begins on time.
- Thank all those involved for a successful candidates' night.

After the Meeting

- Collect vouchers and receipts for reimbursement for expenses agreed upon in advance of the event.



What will the final schedule look like?

Sample:

5:30 PM	Introductions + Opening Statements
5:40 PM	Candidates Discuss Priority Issues
6:00 PM	Public Comments + Questions
6:20 PM	Closing Statements
6:30 PM	Event Concludes

TIME	ACTIVITY
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____
—:—	_____



I don't want to forget...



COMMUNI- CATIONS

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

Writing a Press Release

Creating Content for Social Media

WRITING A MEDIA/PRESS RELEASE

A press release is typically one page. Once the content of the release has been finalized, you should email the content to the list of media, press, and newspapers. It is a good idea to attach a Word document and copy the contents into the body of the email in case the attachment fails to open.

What is the difference between a media advisory and a press release? A media advisory is short and sweet. It describes the quick details about your event, the who/what/when/where and why. Send out a media advisory *before* the event. This will notify the public that this event will take place. You can also choose to send out a press release *before* or *after*. A press release contains more in-depth information; but be careful, it is not meant to be a novel. See the PAGE 26 for samples.

Include the following information at the top of the page:

- + [Top center] Insert your organizational logo
- + [Upper right corner] Contact Information: include the name, phone number, and e-mail address of the person who can be contacted by reporters for more information.
- + [Upper left corner] Date and time for the story's release (e.g., "For Release at 9:00 a.m., October 1, 2022" or "For Immediate Release").
- + [Center] A powerful headline that describes the content. "League of Women Voters to sponsor Candidates Forum." The headline is ninety percent of your release — use it to draw attention to your event.

The diagram illustrates the layout of a press release header. At the top right is the LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE logo. Below it, on the right side, is the contact information: **Contact:**, First Name & Last Name, Phone number // email@email.com. Below that, also on the right, is the release type: **PRESS RELEASE**, For Immediate Release, dd/mm/yy. In the center, there is a **POWERFUL AND EYE CATCHING HEADLINE** followed by a subtitle: *Subtitle for additional info (if necessary)*.


Elements to add to the top of the page.

Apply the inverted pyramid format to your content. A press release must put the important information at the top. Someone reading it will know from the first sentence what the event is about. The inverted pyramid style used the following format:

- + Place: Indicate where your event will take place by inserting “[CITY, STATE]” right before your first sentence.
- + Lead: One to three sentences answering the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- + Bridge: Connects the lead to more detailed information to follow. This section may give more “how” and “why” information not included in the lead.
- + Body: This is your chance to customize and expand on the initial statement. If you use direction quotations (that always attracts attention) use the person’s name, title and connection to the project.
- + Call to action: Tell the reader what you want them to do. Remember, the purpose of the press release is to get attention. You may want to generate an audience or to attract the press to cover your event: “For more information or to volunteer at the forum, call the League of Women Voters at 207-xxx-xxxx” or email at xxx@lwvme.org”
- + Include boilerplate language about the sponsoring organizations and the League of Women Voters.
- + End the press release with ### to indicate the end of the text.

Remember: The goal of a press release is simply to convey information in a clear, inviting, and interesting format.

Submit your press release to a wide media list, including newspapers, such as the large daily newspaper that serves the community, and smaller local weeklies or free newspapers that serve a particular target audience.



Contact:
First Name & Last Name
Phone number // email@email.com

PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
dd/mm/yy

POWERFUL AND EYE CATCHING HEADLINE
Subtitle for additional info (if necessary)

[CITY, STATE] — One to three sentences answering the questions who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Connects the lead to more detailed information to follow. This section may give more “how” and “why” information not included in the lead.

This is your chance to customize and expand on the initial statement. If you use direction quotations (that always attracts attention) use the person’s name, title and connection to the project.

Tell the reader what you want them to do. Remember, the purpose of the press release is to get attention. You may want to generate an audience or to attract the press to cover your event: “For more information or to volunteer at the forum, call the League of Women Voters at 207-xxx-xxxx” or .email at xxx@lwvme.org”

Include boilerplate language about the sponsoring organizations and the League of Women Voters.

###

Elements to add to the content.



League members can use the state contact information on their press releases.

PHONE: (207) 622-0256
EMAIL: info@lwvme.org



The state League will do everything that we can to help spread the word about your forum. For all communication requests, including help writing a press/media release and/or promoting on social media, [click here for the request form](#) or visit: bit.ly/LWVMEcommsRequest.

CREATING CONTENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Today, no media strategy is complete without considering radio, television, and social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Social media in particular is a great way to help spread the word about your event.



The League of Women Voters has a brand standard that follows certain font, color, and logo schemes. It is important to follow these standards so that we remain consistent and recognizable. Of course, if you would rather focus your time and energy planning the event, you can reach out to the Communications Director for support and for graphic design/social media needs. [Click here for the request form](#) or visit: bit.ly/LWVMEcommsRequest.

Want to create your own content? If you are feeling creative and want to tackle creating your own social media posts, you can consider signing up for a free account at Canva.com. Canva takes out some of the guess work when it comes to creating content. They provide plenty of free templates with the appropriate sizing and dimensions. As an example, if you want to post something to Instagram, the graphic will typically be sized 1080 x 1080 px (px = pixels). This is the maximum size, and anything smaller could appear pixelated and difficult to read.

Simple Guidelines: These tips are not set in stone, but they may help you reach maximum engagement with your posts. Remember, the landscape of social media is constantly changing!

- › Use correct image dimensions per each social media platform. This is important so that images are not cropped or difficult to read. [Use this guide to check](#).

Facebook: A shared image should be sized 1200 x 630 px. The algorithm is a mystery and always changing. It can mess with who sees a post, how many will see it, and the order the posts appear within the news feed. Work WITH the algorithm, not against it. Post during high traffic periods. Limit 1 post for every 1-2 hour(s). Keep language relevant and concise. Creating a post that could go viral is a longshot. Paid posting, or a boosted post, can reach thousands of new viewers. Post between 8 am - 8 pm, with 6 am as the earliest and 10 pm as the latest, if it is a hot-topic.

Instagram: A shared image should be sized 1080 x 1080 px. Consider also posting to stories. Instagram Stories are chronological. Every time you post a story, your followers see your account at the top of their feed and know that you have a new story up and new information to share. Stories are sized at 1080 x 1920 px.

Twitter: This is more of a conversational space, so keep it light. Tweets are short in practice anyways! Use branded hashtags but don't go crazy. The best times to post are Wednesday 9am-3pm and Tuesday/Thursday 9am-11am.



GROUND RULES AND TIPS

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

Ground Rules for Candidates and Issues Forums

Tips for Timekeepers

Virtual vs. In-Person Considerations

Responding to and Pre-Empting Candidate Refusals

STANDARD GROUND RULES FOR CANDIDATE AND ISSUE FORUMS



- + All participants use neutral language to describe people and issues.
- + All participants refrain from personal attacks and focus on the issues.
- + Candidates/presenters will observe time limits.
- + The moderator asks the questions.
- + The moderator may interrupt candidates/presenters who go over the time limits.

- + Each candidate/presenter has XX minutes for an opening statement. They draw lots for the order in which they speak. After the opening statements, candidates take questions and alternate speaking first.
- + Each candidate/presenter is given XX minutes to present a closing statement. Once again, they have drawn for the order in which they speak.

- + Some questions have been prepared in advance by the League of Women Voters.
- + Candidate/presenter responses are timed by volunteers.
- + Audience questions must be submitted on 3x5 cards to volunteers who collate them for duplications and eliminate any that include personal attacks.
- + Questions are consolidated by volunteers and presented by the Moderator.
- + A question may be posed to a single candidate/presenter, but the other candidate/presenter is given an opportunity to comment or respond.
- + Responses to these questions are limited to XX minutes.

- + Informational literature may be placed on a table at the back of the room which may be taken by attendees who are interested.
- + No literature may be distributed to the audience by candidates or their agents or placed on chairs in the audience..
- + Banners or signs that support or oppose either candidates or issues are not allowed in the meeting room.

TIPS FOR TIMEKEEPERS

For sponsors to provide to timekeepers



The League of Women Voters prides itself on nonpartisanship and fairness, so we have a strong desire to provide an equitable platform where candidates and speakers can feel respected and supported.

- + Make sure that timekeepers have a copy of the agenda with the timing for the individual segments. Timekeepers need to know if introductory and closing statements are being made, because the timing of these elements may be different from the questions segments.
- + Time keepers are a critical element in the success of any candidates or issue forum. The timekeepers are at the event to watch the clock, not to follow the discussion.
- + Keeping exact time and strict observance of equal time for all presenters or candidates is strictly enforced, especially when the event is televised or recorded for use on radio. In those events, the timekeeping may also involve someone from the television or radio station.
- + Most candidates and speakers expect to pay strict attention to time limits. Do not hesitate to raise the cards at the appropriate time. General courtesy allows a speaker to finish a sentence. Do not worry about interrupting a candidate when the time is up. Interrupting a speaker is the role of the moderator.
- + Having two timekeepers simplifies the task considerably. One person watches the clock or stopwatch, while the other handles the cards that indicate the candidate or speaker that they have one minute remaining (usually a white card), then 30 seconds (usually a yellow card), then time to stop (red card). The ideal arrangement of the cards has the time visible on the front and the back, so that the audience can also see that time is running out.
- + Make sure that the timekeepers are sitting in a location that is visible at all times to the candidates or speakers, as well as the moderator. They are all counting on the timekeepers to keep them on track.
- + Remember that you are there as much to help the moderator keep time of the whole event as to keep the candidates or presenters within the time limits of the questions or statements.
- + If a timekeeper makes a mistake, keep moving. The timing will usually even out from one question segment to another.

TIPS FOR QUESTION SORTERS

For Sponsors to provide to Questions Sorters



- + Sort out any questions that are personal attacks or otherwise inappropriate.
- + Do not drop or discard any questions. Keep all questions and pass them to the moderator. It is permissible to rewrite the question for legibility as an aid to the moderator.
- + Group the questions by topic or common themes.
- + Sort them in terms of importance to the audience.
- + While it is the responsibility of the volunteers to collect and sort the questions, it is the role of the moderator to decide on the sequence of asking the questions and which questions to ask.

 *Notes on timekeeping and taking questions:*

VIRTUAL, HYBRID, IN-PERSON FORUM CONSIDERATIONS

Candidate forums can be held exclusively in-person, at either an indoor or outdoor location. They can also be held exclusively virtually, over a Zoom webinar, a Facebook Live event, or a livestream on a website or YouTube (or they could be pre-recorded without an audience and posted online afterward, although that eliminates the ability for the audience to ask questions of the candidates).

There are also various ways of combining these options into some hybrid format: the candidates, timekeepers, and moderator could be together in-person, but the audience virtual; alternatively, an in-person forum could be livestreamed as well or recorded and posted after the event.

If the forum is livestreamed, questions from the virtual audience could be submitted through the Q&A function of a Zoom webinar or the comment section of a Facebook Live stream.

When deciding whether to host a candidate forum in-person, virtually, or in some hybrid format, consider the following:

- + **Cost:** Holding a virtual forum can eliminate the cost of renting a facility and of purchasing refreshments, notecards, etc. However, access to video technology, like a Zoom webinar license or recording equipment, can be an additional cost for virtual forums.
 - 💡 Consider the specific resources and budget of the organizations sponsoring the forum.
- + **Equipment & Technical Know-How:** The equipment required for a forum will depend on its format but could include: microphones and a sound system; a video recording device; a Zoom webinar license; a computer or tablet for hosting the webinar; connectors for the computer and the video recorder; etc.
 - 💡 Consider whether the organizations sponsoring the forum have access to this equipment, can rent this equipment, or can utilize equipment available from the event facility.
 - 💡 Consider also whether there is someone in the sponsoring organizations who has technical know-how to manage the equipment, a volunteer with such know-how, or someone from the event facility who can manage the equipment.

+ **Audience Participation & Management:**

- › In-person: When a forum is in-person, the audience can participate by submitting questions to the candidates through index cards, which can be sorted before reading aloud.
- › Virtual: If a forum is held as a Zoom webinar, then the audience can submit questions through the Q&A function; the Zoom host can adjust the settings to allow the audience to see any submitted question or only questions that have been tagged as answered. Someone will have to monitor the chat and possibly disable it if trolls take over; alternatively, the Zoom host can change the settings to allow only the host and panelists to post in the chat.
- › Livestreamed on Facebook or another platform: If a forum is livestreamed on Facebook or another platform, like YouTube, the audience can post questions in the comments section; someone will need to monitor the comments section to sort questions and remove inappropriate comments.
- › Streamed on local television or pre-recorded: If a forum is streamed on local television or pre-recorded and posted online afterward, the audience would only have the opportunity to submit questions if those questions have been solicited in advance through email or voicemail.

💡 Consider the following questions:

- Do we, the forum sponsors, and the moderator have the capacity to sort through multiple forms of question submission (i.e., if a forum is on Zoom AND Facebook Live or in-person AND on Zoom)?
- Do we have the capacity to monitor comment sections of a platform, if we are livestreaming a forum? What is our policy about removing or responding to inappropriate comments?
- How much time are we scheduling for audience questions? What value do we place upon audience participation?
- Are we engaging any other individuals or groups in writing the questions that we provide to candidates in advance of a forum as another avenue of constituent input? For example, are we working with some local high school students?
- Are we publishing an email address to submit questions to in our press release or other promotional materials? How are we incorporating those questions into the forum?

+ **Accessibility:** Both the in-person and the virtual format create their own challenges for some constituents looking to access the forum. Consider the following:

- › In-person: In-person forums require constituents to travel to a certain location at a certain time; this could be challenging for those with limited access to transportation, those who work evenings, or those who have childcare or other care obligations. Recording an in-person forum and posting it online can provide an alternative for these constituents, though watching a recorded forum does not provide the same opportunity to submit a question as attending the forum.
- › Virtual: Virtual forums eliminate the need for travel or childcare posed by in-person forums. However, reliable internet access is still a challenge to

participation in virtual events for many Mainers. Recording a forum and posting it online could allow constituents without internet access at home to watch it at a later time somewhere with public internet, like a library (again, watching a recorded forum does not provide the same opportunity to submit a question as attending the forum).

+ **Candidate or Speaker Availability:** especially if the issue or candidate forum is relevant to a broad geographic area, it may be easier for candidates and speakers to participate in one virtual forum, available throughout the relevant geography, than to participate in multiple events. For example, a candidate for U.S. Senate in Hancock County might be asked to appear in Blue Hill, Ellsworth, and Bar Harbor if the event is in-person. That same candidate might only need to appear once if the event is virtual or hybrid.



Notes on how I can keep my event accessible:

RESPONDING TO CANDIDATE REFUSALS



Sometimes, candidates will refuse to participate in nonpartisan candidate forums organized by the League of Women Voters of Maine or a Local League chapter. In these cases, LWVME's candidate forum policy states:

If one or more of the invited candidates declines to attend (or fails to appear at) the forum, the forum may go forward only if at least two of the candidates for that office accept the invitation and attend the forum. The League Ed. Fund will not sponsor forums in elections where the candidate is unopposed.

Thus, when only one candidate agrees to participate, neither the League of Women Voters of Maine nor the Local League chapters in Maine can hold a forum. However, the candidate forum policy does not address how to communicate to the public this inability to hold a forum due to candidate refusals. A Local League chapter can decide to publish a statement about their intent, but ultimate inability, to hold a forum on their webpage or social media. They can also write a letter to the editor in a local newspaper explaining why they will not be holding a candidate forum for a particular race.

Alternatively, a Local League chapter can decide not to publish a statement about their attempt to hold a forum. However, if a chapter does not publicly state that they tried to organize a candidate forum, constituents are unaware not only of the Local League's effort to provide a platform to inform voters, but also of the candidate's or candidates' refusal to participate. Voters might feel like a candidate's willingness or unwillingness to participate in a nonpartisan forum is a factor in their evaluation of that candidate's fitness for public office. After all, refusing to participate in a forum where the audience of future constituents has an opportunity to ask questions could indicate a potential lack of commitment to the values of accountability, transparency, or responsiveness to constituents.

In 2022, the Downeast League attempted to organize a candidate forum for the June Special Election for Maine Senate District 7. The Democratic candidate agreed to participate, but neither the Republican nor the Green Independent candidates did. After being contacted by a constituent asking why they were not holding a forum, the Downeast League decided to publish a statement in a Letter to the Editor in the local newspaper. If your Local League is looking to publish a similar statement, consider this letter as a model: <https://www.ellsworthamerican.com/opinions/mark-your-calendars-voters/>

PRE-EMPTING CANDIDATE REFUSALS



Ideally, of course, two or more candidates would agree to participate in a nonpartisan candidate forum organized by LWVME or a Local League chapter. LWVME and Local League chapters can employ a few different strategies to try to reduce the likelihood of candidate refusals. Such strategies include:

- + Proactively reaching out to state, county, and local political parties to inform them of your nonpartisan voter education efforts, like Vote 411 and candidate forums, and ask them to encourage their candidates to participate.
- + Recruiting co-sponsors in advance who are likely to be influential: the local newspaper, the Chamber of Commerce, and other civic groups are good candidates.
- + Politely informing the candidate, when inviting them to participate, that if the League is unable to hold the forum due to candidate refusals, your policy is to issue a public statement explaining to voters why you were unable to do so.
- + Coordinating a pressure campaign: organizing constituents to reach out to candidates urging them to participate in a candidate forum; having co-sponsoring organizations that have some political influence, like the local Chamber of Commerce, invite candidates or follow up with their own invitation; seeing if any local businesses or groups will send letters to the candidate encouraging participation.

If you find that any of these strategies — or others — are successful in persuading candidates to participate in your forums, please let LWVME know! We are interested in hearing what strategies might increase participation in nonpartisan forums (and also, what strategies do not work).



SAMPLES

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

Sample Media Advisory

Sample Press Release

Sample Program



Contact:

Jen Lancaster
(207) 622-0256 // info@lwwme.org

MEDIA ADVISORY
For Immediate Release
10/03/2022

MEET THE CANDIDATES AND HEAR WHERE THEY STAND ON THE ISSUES

League of Women Voters to Host Nonpartisan Forum

[AUGUSTA, ME] — The League of Women Voters of Maine will host a candidate forum for the open Maine House of Representative seat serving District 86. All candidates will be present, including John Smith, Jane Doe, and Jack Black. Attendees can participate via zoom and hear from the candidates, learn where they stand on important issues facing Augusta residents, and ask questions. The forum is free and open to the public.

WHO: This event is co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Maine, the local public library, and local city government.

WHEN: Thursday, October 6 from 5:30-6:30 PM.

WHERE: Hosted live on Zoom. [Link to Register.](#)

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not endorse any political party or candidate for elective office.

###

SAMPLE | Media Advisory



NOTE: A media advisory is short and sweet. It offers just the right amount of necessary information. In this example, the advisory will be sent out a few days before the actual event.



Contact:

Jen Lancaster
(207) 622-0256 // info@lwvme.org

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

10/03/2022

MEET THE CANDIDATES AND HEAR WHERE THEY STAND ON THE ISSUES

League of Women Voters to Host Nonpartisan Forum

[AUGUSTA, ME] — The League of Women Voters of Maine will host a candidate forum for the open Maine House of Representatives seat serving District 86. All candidates will be present, including John Smith, Jane Doe, and Jack Black. Attendees can tune in virtually zoom on Thursday, October 6 from 5:30-6:30 PM.

Participants can expect to hear opening statements prepared by the candidates, as well as questions prepared in advance by members of the League of Women Voters. These questions will dive into the most important issues and concerns facing Augusta residents today. Before the conclusion of the forum, there will be approximately twenty minutes of allotted time for questions from the public.

The forum is free and open to the public and will be hosted live on Zoom. To register in advance, attendees can visit [[link to register](#)]. This event will also be recorded and available on [Youtube](#) the next day, October 7.

This event is designed to offer space for residents to learn more about their candidates and make informed decisions on Election Day. The forum will be nonpartisan, as the League of Women Voters never endorses or opposes candidates.

The event is co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Maine, the local public library, and local city government.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not endorse any political party or candidate for elective office.

###

SAMPLE | Press Release



NOTE: A press release is longer than a media advisory. A press release can be sent a few days before the event or be modified and sent afterwards.



CANDIDATES' FORUM FOR DISTRICT 7 DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Monday, October 20, 2014

6:00 — 7:15 PM

Ellsworth City Hall Auditorium

Ellsworth, ME

PROGRAM

Sponsors: League of Women Voters of Maine, Ellsworth American, and American Association of University Women

Moderator: Stephen Fay

Schedule:

- 6:00 PM Welcome + Introductions
6:05 PM Instructions to Candidates and Audience
6:07 PM Candidate Introductions
6:15 PM Candidates' Opening Remarks
6:20 PM Candidates' Responses to Prepared Questions
- + What would be your office's position on domestic abuse plea bargains? Are there specific changes you would recommend in the office's approach to domestic abuse?
 - + What are your views on alternative sentencing to avoid incarceration for nonviolent offenders?
 - + What are your views on other alternative sentencing programs, such as drug courts, restorative justice, etc. What about victim restitution?
- 6:50 PM Written Questions from the Audience
7:05 PM Candidates' Closing Statement
7:15 PM Adjourn + Informal Discussion

Election Day is November 4, 2014. For more information on the candidates and the issues, go to the following web sites:

- www.lwvme.org
- www.ellsworthamerican.com
- www.mdislander.com
- www.weeklypacket.com

Candidates:

Matt Foster is an attorney in private practice in Ellsworth concentrating on criminal defense for indigent defendants. He grew up in Ellsworth and graduated from Ellsworth High School. He subsequently earned his BA in psychology from the University of Maine at Orono, and his MBA and JD from Suffolk University in Boston. He served in the United States Army as an Airborne Combat Medic in the 82nd Airborne Division. He has previously held public office as an Ellsworth City Councilor and as an appointed member

of the Ellsworth Zoning Board of Appeals. He lives in Ellsworth in the house where he grew up with his wife, Melissa, their daughter Aislinn, and their niece, Aliza.

Phone: 266-6233 or 667-7273

Email: foster1969@yahoo.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DistrictAttorneyMattFoster>

Mail: P.O. Box 685, Ellsworth, Maine 04605

Bill Entwisle is an assistant district attorney in District 7, a position that he has held for over ten years. He has worked as a prosecutor in both Hancock and Washington Counties. Before that, he was in private practice for fifteen years, first in Portland concentrating in commercial law, then in Hancock County, practicing primarily family law and real estate. He grew up in New Jersey and spent summer vacations in Maine. He earned his BA in economics from Bates College and his law degree from Franklin Pierce Law Center (now New Hampshire School of Law). This is the first time that he has sought elective office. He lives with his wife, Margot, in Sedgwick. They have three sons, Sam, Noah, and Will.

Phone: 664-8449

Email: Entwisle.da@gmail.com

Mail: PO Box 1222, Ellsworth, Maine 04605

Sponsors:

The League of Women Voters of Maine (LWVME) is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League does not endorse any political party or candidate for elective office.

The Ellsworth American, now in its 160th year of publication, is a locally owned and managed weekly newspaper serving Hancock County, Maine.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) is the nation's leading voice promoting equity and education for women and girls. Since our founding in 1881, AAUW members have examined and taken positions on the fundamental issues of the day — educational, social, economic, and political.

Moderator:

Stephen Fay, a native of Berkeley, Calif., has been managing editor of The Ellsworth American since 1996. He is also chairman of the Board of the Downeast YMCA. He and his wife, Martha, have two grown daughters.



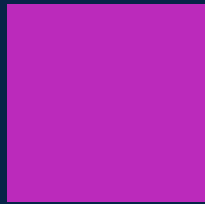
PRINTABLES

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

Table name tent

Cut along the solid line. Fold along the dotted line. Write the candidate's name in the space provided.

Candidate's first and last name



OUR POLICIES

INSIDE THIS CHAPTER:

LWVME Candidate Forum Policy

LWVME Issue Forum Policy

POLICY ON CANDIDATE FORUMS FOR FEDERAL AND STATEWIDE ELECTIONS

01/29/2022 —

[Amended and Readopted by LWVME and LWVME Education Fund]

Other League policies can be found at lwvme.org/policies.

The League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund intends to sponsor nonpartisan candidate forums for the offices of United States House of Representative, United States Senate and Governor of the State of Maine in the fall preceding a general election. Such forums will provide fair and impartial treatment of candidates, will not promote or advance one candidate over another, and will make no reference to an issue advocacy position taken by the League of Women Voters of Maine.

The forums are designed to meet four goals:

1. to educate the public about a broad range of 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, and
4. to provide an opportunity for the candidates to engage their constituents.

We believe that these purposes are best served by including those candidates with significant district-wide voter support and interest. After careful consideration, the League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund has adopted criteria it believes are nonpartisan, capable of objective application, and understandable to candidates and the public.

To be invited to participate in a League-sponsored forum for Governor, United States Senate or United States House of Representatives, a candidate must:

1. win the nomination of their party in the primary election
- or**
2. qualify for the ballot as an unenrolled or independent candidate.

Invited candidates must e-mail or send a letter of intent to participate no later than 30 days prior to the scheduled forum.

If the forum is to be broadcast, invited candidates must sign the broadcast agreement prior to the forum or they will not be able to participate—no exceptions. The League will record and make available to the public in their entirety audio and video of sponsored forums.

If one or more of the invited candidates declines to attend (or fails to appear at) the forum, the forum may go forward only if at least two of the candidates for that office accept the invitation and attend the forum. The League Ed. Fund will not sponsor forums in elections where the candidate is unopposed. There will be no substitutes or stand-ins for the candidates.

The League may opt to cosponsor a forum with other organizations as long as those potential partner organizations do not endorse candidates or do not have a 501(c)(4) affiliate organization that endorses candidates. Exceptions may be made for mainstream news media that endorse candidates on their editorial pages as long as the endorsement comes after the sponsored event.

POLICY ON CANDIDATE FORUMS FOR FEDERAL AND STATEWIDE ELECTIONS

07/17/2021 —

[Amended and Readopted by LWVME and LWVME Education Fund]

Other League policies can be found at lwvme.org/policies.

The League of Women Voters of Maine and League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund sponsor neutral educational forums on ballot questions and other issues of interest to local communities and the state.

The forums are designed to meet three goals:

1. to educate the public about the issues,
2. to provide an opportunity for voters to hear proponents and opponents discuss the issues face-to-face, and
3. to stimulate public interest and participation in the elections.

After careful consideration, the League of Women Voters of Maine and League of Women Voters of Maine Education Fund have adopted the following policy for conducting issue forums.

1. LWVME/Education Fund will not sponsor neutral issue forums featuring both proponents and opponents on any question where the League has an advocacy position on the question. In this case, the League may sponsor programs promoting its position only.
2. To ensure parity between the two sides of a question or issue, participants should be the designated representatives of organized groups working on behalf of or in opposition to the question. This could mean that participants are affiliated with a political action committee formed to work on the question, or it could be that participants are representatives of long-standing organizations that have taken a position on the question.
3. If one or more of the invited participants declines to attend so that one side of the issue or ballot question is not represented at all, the forum should not be scheduled.
4. If one or more of the confirmed participants cancels at the last minute, they may designate a substitute or replacement to represent their views.
5. If one or more of the confirmed participants fails to appear or cancels at the last minute without designating a replacement, the remaining participant(s) may present their views and take questions from the audience.
6. Any participant who has registered for a campaign with the Secretary of State's office and is, therefore, a prospective candidate for elected office is prohibited from participating in an issue forum.