

Forums in a Box

**A Toolkit for the League of Women Voters of Maine
Planning and Conducting Standardized Candidate and Issue Forums
In Collaboration with Local Organizers**



League of Women Voters of Maine



Acknowledgements

The *Forums in a Box Toolkit* has been developed to help the League of Women Voters of Maine partner with other organizations to conduct candidate and issue forums in local communities. The *Forums in a Box Toolkit* is a format that allows the League of Women Voters of Maine to engage a number of local community groups to sponsor a series of forums on a single topic or in a single election season. The Toolkit also acknowledges that other community groups often co-sponsor these events and that all involved need to ensure that tasks are clearly assigned and responsibilities clearly articulated.

The *Forums in a Box* format is not intended to replace the activities of local Leagues conducting forums on their own or in collaboration with local co-sponsor.

As we blocked out the *Forums in a Box Toolkit* we identified two distinct roles.

- The League of Women Voters of Maine provides the expertise of conducting the event, procuring the panel, and providing the moderator.
- A local organization takes on the responsibilities for the logistics and publicity for 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 in a turnkey series.

Helpful links: <http://www.lwv.org/member-resources>. The publication, *Face to Face*, is a treasure trove of helpful information at <http://www.lwv.org/content/face-face>

Some of the following pages have a small icon in the upper right hand corner. This is to indicate those pages that are part of the companion document for local organizers.

We hope this *Forums in a Box Toolkit* will help the League of Women Voters of Maine to bring alive political candidate and issue campaigns to benefit communities all over the state.

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2012

Forums in a Box Toolkit for the League of Women Voters of Maine

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In addition to this document, the Toolkit comes with a physical box that contains all the things that you need to conduct a community forum, whether on an issue or for candidates.

Contents of a Supply Box

- League Banner
- Gavel
- Directional signs with League logos
- Strips for drawing order of speaking for opening statements and closing remarks
- Masking Tape
- Magic Markers
- 3x5 cards
- Pens or pencils
- Table tents for candidates or presenters (names on both sides)
- Notepads for candidates/presenters, and moderator
- Timekeeper cards (1 minute, 30 seconds, stop)
- Stop watch or clock
- Membership brochures



Guidelines for Forums in a Box

This toolkit is designed for the League of Women Voters of Maine to work with groups that want to sponsor 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 speakers on a topic, the ground rules, and the format. The League of Women Voters also provides moderators.
- For candidate events, the League of Women Voters will contact the candidates, provide a moderator, provide ground rules and 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.

The League of Women Voters will provide:

- Contact with Speaker(s) or Presenter(s) for issue forums or Candidates for candidate forums
- Moderator
- Format
- Ground rules
- Sample questions

The Local Organizing Committee 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. Even in cases where the League of Women Voters has a position supporting or opposing a particular issue, any event sponsored or supported by the League of Women Voters will be conducted with the utmost respect for neutrality and nonpartisanship.



Guidelines for Inviting Candidates or Presenters on Issues

A general reminder: Candidate and issue forums sponsored by the League of Women Voters must conform to three key League principles:

- They must be nonpartisan. The League never supports or opposes any party or candidate.
- They do not generally promote a position if the objective is to present citizens with information about candidates and the issues as a foundation for making decisions in the voting booth. They are not a forum for recommending action on issues.
- Because of the inevitable conflict that occurs when the League seeks to present an unbiased issue forum on an issue where the League has taken a position or is engaged in electoral work on a ballot question, it has been the policy and practice of the League of Women Voters of Maine to abstain from sponsoring issue forums on those questions.

Inviting candidates or presenters on issues: Oftentimes the initial contact with candidates or representatives of issue campaigns is made by phone, but an immediate follow up letter is always good practice, whether hard copy or email. Depending on the particular race or issue, candidates may have representatives who work with us to set up forums, rather than working directly with the candidates. So make sure that the candidate actually has in writing what their representative has agreed to on their behalf.

The format will already have been determined. Be sure that ground rules and the proposed format are included in that initial letter.

A letter of confirmation contains the following items:

- Date, time, and place of the proposed forum
- Offices/issues to be included
- Brief summary of the League's nonpartisan policy.
- Names of sponsors of the meetings, including co-sponsors.
- Purpose of the forum—to provide a public service to voters
- Format for the forum
- Request biographical information of candidates or presenters
- Policy decisions already made by sponsors or co-sponsors, such as date, location, format, opening and closing statements, topics for discussion, criteria for meeting cancellation, distribution of campaign literature
- Whether or not the forum will be televised, broadcast or recorded
- Date by which a confirmation reply is requested.

Be prepared to follow up with a telephone call if the responses are not received. These are very busy people at a very busy time of year.

Selecting a format: The format depends on the number of candidate races or issues which are covered by the forum. Formats can vary widely depending on the circumstances of the election year or the issues at stake. Whatever format is selected, it should be carefully worked out in advance with the full understanding of the participants, and deliberately timed. The simpler the format, the easier it is for all participants to follow. It takes a very skilled moderator to keep track of a complex format.

Expectations for Local Organizers



Planning in Advance

Establish a budget

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

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 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.

Designing a public relations campaign

- Invite the audience
 - Announce the event to members of sponsoring organizations and the public
- Announce the event in the press and on social networking sites
 - Inform the newspapers. Start early. Send an announcement 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 members of sponsoring organizations in the area where the Forum will be held.
- Inform community leaders, as well as state and federal legislators who live in the area.
- Place a notice on public community bulletin board (such as MPBN).
- Notify other organizations that maintain community calendars, such as radio and television stations.

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.

Screening and organizing questions

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

At the Event



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 parking lot and building entrance.
- Display organizational banner or identifying poster.
- Bring recruitment and informational materials from sponsoring organization.
- Set up table at the entrance to the room:
 - Display materials from organizations and presenters
- Ensure that microphones (if used) are live and working properly.
- Provide water for speakers (no ice because it sometimes affects the voice of the speaker).
- Supply two timekeepers. Make sure the timers know 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 stop watch and a second person holds up the cards. White for 1 minute; yellow for 30 seconds left; red for stop.

Screening and organizing questions

- Arrange for volunteers to collect and collate 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.

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).



Tips for the League of Women Voters

Planning in Advance

Establish a budget

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

Determine the format. The format will be the same for all forums in the series.

- Decide what the format of the forum will be, i.e. questions from the audience, a panel of media representatives, or organizational representatives.
- Confirm the order of speaking, who introduces the presenters, the issues, the ground rules and the format.
- Decide on any prepared questions that will be provided to participants in advance.
- Be clear how the event should end. Clarify if the presenters/candidates will make closing statements, or whether the moderator should look for a question that provides an opportunity for the presenters to bring together the issues discussed during the forum.

Logistics

- Determine whether or not the event will be televised and whether the press is invited.
- Provide preferred room setup to the local coordinator.

Invite panel members and/or representatives of the issues

- Prepare a standard letter of invitation. Clarify who will sign and send the letter.
- Confirm contact information for presenters and local committee contacts.
- Confirm participation by phone.
- Send letter to confirm speakers/presenters/candidates.

Select a moderator for each venue

- A moderator should be trained and experienced with the League of Women Voters.
- The moderator should not be identified with the candidates or the issues.
- A moderator from the local community understands the issues. A moderator from another community may appear to be more neutral.
- Provide all relevant background material to the moderator in advance of the forum. That may include a briefing on the political climate and the format of the event.
- Provide a typed copy of the forum agenda/program to the moderator and the presenters, the text of the issues being discussed, and the positions of each of the presenters.

Maintain contact with speakers/presenters/candidates

- Clarify who will be the key contact prior to the event. Exchange cell phone numbers.
- Maintain contact with the speakers/presenters/candidates.
- Inform them of the format and timing of the agenda etc.

- Give them the major questions that each one will address, if any, and let them know whether they will have time for a prepared opening or closing statement.

Announce the event

- Inform all League members in the area where the forum will be held.
- Put it on Facebook and websites of LWVME.

Confirm everything

- Confirm the roles that each organization will play and the format for the event.
- Confirm with co-sponsors who will introduce the moderator and candidates/presenters.
- Confirm with co-sponsors that they have arranged for people to collect and sort questions.
- Confirm with co-sponsors that they have arranged for timekeepers.
- Prepare in advance several questions to start off the event, or to provide questions if the audience does not produce a sufficient number of questions, or to ensure balance in the questioning, or to fill the time.

At the Event

Things to bring

- Display organizational banner or identifying poster
- Recruitment and informational materials from the League of Women Voters.
- Table tents (name cards) with presenter names on both sides so that the moderator can see their names as well as the audience.

Conducting the forum

- Determine the order of speaking.
- Provide a script to the moderator with complete names of presenters/candidates and other relevant information, including the text of the issues under consideration and the positions of the presenters on the issues. Do not assume that a moderator knows this information.
- The sponsoring organization(s) welcome the participants and the audience and introduces the moderator.
- The moderator introduces the presenters, the issues, the ground rules, and the format.
- The moderator is responsible for conducting of the event.
- While it is the responsibility of volunteers to collect and sort the questions, it is the role of the moderator to screen the questions and to decide the sequence of asking the questions.

Wrap up and conclusion

- Make sure that presenters know which is the final question or the closing statement.
- Assist in clearing the room and closing up the event.

After the Event

- Collect vouchers and receipts for reimbursement for expenses agreed upon in advance of the event.
- Send thank you notes or emails to candidates/ presenters and sponsoring organizations.

Tips for Moderators



For the League of Women Voters to provide to the Moderator

Meeting logistics

- Be prepared.
- Arrive at least 30 minutes before the starting time.
- Bring your own copy of the format/agenda.
- Bring your own notepad and pen or pencil to take notes during the event.
- Bring a timer or stop watch or a watch with a second hand. Even with assigned time keepers, you will need to know the overall time frame for questions.

You as moderator

- You represent the League of Women Voters, first and foremost a nonpartisan organization.
- Be absolutely neutral.
- A sense of humor and proportion are essential ingredients in an effective moderator. Above all, be gracious, pleasant, fair, and firm.
- Gauge the audience. If the audience appears to be stacked towards one side or another, do everything in your power to ensure that the questioning is fair and neutral.

Conducting the forum

- Verify who is doing introductions--you (the moderator) or someone representing a sponsoring organization (the host) or the local League of Women Voters.
- Be sure that you have the complete names (and pronunciation) of all presenters/candidates
- Prepare a Sample Question Grid to track responses for each presenter/candidate for each question.
- Track question segments for balance in content and bias. (For example, if all the questions seem stacked towards one side or one candidate, insert a question that allows for an opposing viewpoint.)
- While it is the responsibility of other volunteers to collect and sort the questions, it is the role of the moderator to decide the sequence of asking the questions. Look for balance, interest, and variety.

Screening and organizing questions

- Ensure that the host organization has arranged for volunteers to collect and sort questions.
- The League of Women Voters should prepare in advance several questions to start off the event, or to provide questions if the audience does not produce a sufficient number of questions, or to ensure balance in the questioning, or to fill the time.
- Make sure you know how the questions will get from the volunteers in the back of the room to you 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.

- A candidate or issue forum is not a conversation between the audience and the speakers. Use of written questions provides a sense of formality to maintain a climate of civil discourse.
- Do not hesitate to use the gavel to preserve or restore decorum.
- If the audience or the presenters should get heated or emotional in such a way that you as the moderator believe that either the presenters or the audience are at personal risk, the moderator has the authority to end the event.

Wrap up and conclusion

- Know how the event should end. Check to see if the presenters will make closing statements, or whether the moderator should look for a question that provides an opportunity for the presenters to bring together the issues discussed during the forum.
- Allow host organizations to express thanks or any concluding remarks.
- Wrap up the event with thanks and a reminder to vote.
- Provide support for hosts in closing up the event (clearing the room, ensuring that tables, chairs are returned to their proper place).



Tips for Time Keepers

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 time keepers 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 time keeping 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 time keepers simplifies the task considerably. One person watches the clock or stop watch, 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).
- Make sure that the time keepers 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 time keepers 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 time keeper 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.
- 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.

Candidate or Issue Forum Checklist For the League of Women Voters



General Planning (2-3 months ahead) (LWV)

- ✓ Determine which election areas, districts or issues to cover.
- ✓ Choose format: debate, panel discussion, several districts at one meeting, etc.
- ✓ Decide on ground rules such as speaking order, time limits, type of questions, etc.
- ✓ Select choice of dates, times and facilities.
- ✓ Choose cosponsor(s), if any.
- ✓ List possible moderators.
- ✓ Identify the media in your area: contact person, address, and phone number.
- ✓ Present plan to League board for approval.

Arrangements (2 months ahead) (Local Organization)

- ✓ 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 moderator or panelists, timekeepers, hostesses, voter registration person, membership person, publications person.
- ✓ Confirm arrangements with cosponsors.

Invitations (6 weeks ahead) (LWV)

- ✓ Send individual letters or emails to each candidate; including time, place, ground rules, format, and phone number of League contact person. Request RSVP by certain date.
- ✓ Send confirming letters to candidates with ground rules.

Publicity (4 weeks ahead) (Local Organization)

- ✓ Send letters of invitation to media.
- ✓ Arrange for newspaper photographer.
- ✓ Draft press release; include League contact phone number.
- ✓ Print and distribute flyers.
- ✓ Arrange signs, decorations, and flag.
- ✓ Invite local luminaries.

Preparation (4 weeks ahead)(LWV)

- ✓ Inventory the supply box. (See page 3)
- ✓ Arrange for League banner to be displayed
- ✓ Prepare written agenda; include format of candidate forum, list of candidates, office for which they are running, length of term, party designation, and election information. Optional: space to write questions, League donation/membership form, and candidates' biographical information.
- ✓ Announce meeting in League newsletter
- ✓ Clip newspaper articles related to meeting and election for League archives.

Preparation (2-3 weeks ahead) (LWV)

- ✓ Procure stopwatch, gavel, and time cards.
- ✓ Distribute agenda with timing rules and order of business to moderator, president, timekeeper, candidates, etc.
- ✓ Release pre-meeting publicity promoting attendance and encouraging citizens to vote.
- ✓ Confirm all arrangements.

Hospitality (2 weeks ahead) (Local Organization)

- ✓ Arrange appropriate refreshments and necessary supplies.
- ✓ Arrange water glasses, paper and pencils for candidates.
- ✓ Also prepare front tables, if used: tablecloths, table tents for panelists and moderator.
- ✓ Prepare nametags for all candidates, moderator, timekeeper, panelists, hosts and sponsors.
- ✓ Arrange press section and credentials.

At the Meeting (LWV)

- ✓ 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 (LWV)

- ✓ Write thank you notes.
- ✓ Submit vouchers and receipts for reimbursement.
- ✓ Prepare evaluation for files.

Sample Letter of Invitation



Date

Candidate Name
Candidate Address

Dear Candidate,

The League of Women Voters [and names of sponsoring organizations] invite you to participate in a forum of this year's candidates [for offices (town council, school board, state legislature, etc.)] OR to represent a position on the referendum question [add question # and topic]. All candidates are being invited to participate.

OR Representatives of both Yes and No campaigns have been invited to participate.

We would like to schedule the forum for the [indicate date, time, or range of dates] in [location] to allow for audience participation.

The format will be determined by a committee of League of Women Voters members. Pre-determined questions will be sent in advance of the event. Questions will also be solicited from the audience and from our membership. They will be collected and sorted by volunteers who will present them to the moderator.

Our organizations are looking for a non-partisan event to learn about the candidates and/or the issues relevant to this election.

Please let us know by [set a reply date at least a month before the scheduled event], if you are able to attend. You may email me at [insert email address of contact person] or call me [insert telephone number].

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[President or other LWV contact]
League of Women Voters

Sample Issue Forum Confirming Letter



Date

Name

Address

via e-mail at «Email»

Dear Name:

Thank you for accepting the invitation to speak at the issue forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Maine and the [Name of Co-Sponsoring Organization]. The sponsors are not taking a position on either of the referendum questions but are sponsoring the forum to provide the public with an opportunity to learn more about both sides of the issues.

The forum will take place on [insert date, time, and location]. Driving directions are included at the bottom of this letter.

Question 1 will present first, from [start and end times]. Question 2 will present second, from [start and end times]. Please plan to arrive a few minutes early.

To insure that the forum operates smoothly, the League has adopted the following ground rules:

[NOTE: Be sure to synchronize these ground rules with those distributed to co-sponsors and the moderator].

- ✦ Informational literature may be placed on a table designated by the sponsors and may be taken by those attendees who are interested.
- ✦ No literature may be handed to attendees by either you or your supporters.
- ✦ Neither you nor your supporters are permitted to bring banners or signs to the forum location
- ✦ The time limits for statements and responses will be strictly enforced.
- ✦ If you can meet us a few minutes early, we will review the evening's proceedings, and you will draw for the order in which you will make opening statements and closing statements.
- ✦ Each of you will have XX minutes to make an opening statement. (The order in which you speak will have been determined by the earlier drawing.)
- ✦ The person making the first opening statement will also be the person who first responds to the first question. Thereafter, you will each alternate who is the first to respond to each question.
- ✦ Each of you will then be presented with questions posed by the audience on index cards that will be collected by volunteers. Volunteers will screen, sort, and consolidate the questions, which will then be presented to the moderator. Each of you will have the

opportunity to respond to each question, with each response limited to X minutes. At X minutes per question segment, we should have time for X questions from the audience.

- ✦ Finally, each of you will be given X minutes to present a closing statement. The order of the closing statements will be determined by the earlier drawing
- ✦ If you have any questions about the ground rules, please do not hesitate to contact me at the League office at XXX-XXXX or at home at XXX-XXXX.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters and the [Name of Co-Sponsoring Organization], I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this educational forum. We are looking forward to an informative discussion on [Insert date].

Sincerely,

[President or other LWV contact]
LWVME

[President or other contact]
Co-Sponsoring Organization

The League of Women Voters of Maine 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 [Name of Co-Sponsoring Organization] [insert mission of organization].



Writing a Press Release

A press release is only one page — one double-spaced side of an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of paper. Edit the text until it fits. Most newspapers require that press releases be emailed. 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

Include the following information at the top of the page:

- **(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, 2010" or "For Immediate Release").
- 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.

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:

- *Lead:* One to three sentences that answer 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. Today no media strategy is complete without considering radio, television, and social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, or My Space.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[Insert date of release]

Contact: [Insert Name]
[Insert Organization]
207.XXX-XXXX
[Email address](#)

***LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE AND [Insert Name of Organization]
COSPONSOR FORUM ON REFERENDUM ISSUES
[Insert titles of questions to be Discussed [Insert Date]***

ANYTOWN, ME – On [Insert date], the League of Women of Maine and the [Name of Co-Sponsoring Organization] will present an Issues Forum on both referendum questions facing Maine voters in November. The program will be held at the [Insert location], [Insert times] p.m. Name, of the League of Women Voters of Maine, will moderate.

Question 1 – [Insert questions title] – will be discussed first beginning at X:XX p.m. Presenting their views on Question 1 will be: [Insert Name of Presenter and Organization], an organization supporting the referendum; and [Insert Name of Presenter and Organization], a coalition opposed to the referendum.

Discussion of Question 2 – [Insert title of question] – will begin at X:XX. A representative to be named from [Insert Name of Presenter and Organization] will support the referendum. [Insert Name of Presenter and Organization], will represent a coalition opposed to the referendum.

The forum is open to the public. Light refreshments will be provided, and audience members will have a chance to submit questions of their own to speakers.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, 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 [Insert Name of Organization and their mission]

####

Sample Program/Agenda



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

[Insert date]

[Insert time]

[Insert location]

Anytown, Maine

Introductions: [Insert name of host and co-sponsoring organization]

Moderator: [Insert name of moderator] of League of Women Voters of Maine

Instructions to Speakers and Audience

Question 1 – [Insert title of question]

- ✦ Opening Statements (X minutes each)
- ✦ Panelists Respond to Prepared Question (X minutes each)
- ✦ Written Questions from the Audience (X minutes per response)
- ✦ Closing Statements. (X minutes each)

Question 2 – [Insert title of question]

- ✦ Opening Statements (X minutes each)
- ✦ Panelists Respond to Prepared Question (X minutes each)
- ✦ Written Questions from the Audience (X minutes per response)
- ✦ Closing Statements. (X minutes each)

Break (15 minutes)

Adjourn.

Refreshments and Informal Discussion

Election Day

[Insert election date].

Polls are open from [Insert local times]

[Insert local polling place(s)]

Town Office Insert address]

Municipal Clerk

[Insert Name and contact information for local election clerk]

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.

[Insert name of Co-Sponsoring Organization and mission statement].

Moderator:

[Insert name of moderator] [Include brief biographical information for moderator]

Participants:

Question 1 - Pro

[Insert Name and contact information]

Question 1 - Con

[Insert Name and contact information]

Question 2 - Pro

[Insert Name and contact information]

Question 2 - Con

[Insert Name and contact information]

[Insert title of question]

[Insert text of referendum or legislative issue]

[Insert title of question]

[Insert text of referendum or legislative issue]

For more information on the candidates and the issues, go to www.lwvme.org.

Notes:

Sample Question Grid for Moderators (Candidate Forum)

Candidate forums often begin with an opening statement and end with closing statements. These usually are longer than the question segments. Estimate the length of each question segment based upon the answer length agreed to initially. For instance, if each candidate is allowed 2 minutes to respond, each question segment will be approximately 8-10 minutes, allowing for asking the question and transitioning to each candidate. In a 60 minute forum you can answer at least 10 questions. Be prepared with extra questions to ensure enough variety. If you switch the rotation about half way through the forum, you will allow candidates a chance to respond in a different order.

Question segment (topic)	Candidate A	Candidate B	Candidate C	Candidate D
1	1	2	3	4
2	2	3	4	1
3	3	4	1	2
4	4	1	2	3
5	1	2	3	4
6	4	3	2	1
7	3	2	1	4
8	2	1	4	3
9	1	4	3	2
10	4	3	2	1

Sample Question Grid for the Moderator (Issue Forum)

Depending on the format adopted for the forum, estimate the total time for each question segment. For instance, if each side is allowed 3 minutes to respond to a question, each question segment will take about 6-7 minutes to allow time to ask the question, for each side to present its case and to wrap up the question. That means that a 60 minute forum could use at least 10 questions. Most often, presenters do not fill the entire time. You should also allow for opening remarks, opening statements, closing statements, or closing remarks by hosts and sponsors.

Question segment (topic)	Presenter Pro	Presenter Con
1	1	2
2	2	1
3	1	2
4	2	1
5	1	2
6	2	1
7	1	2
8	2	1
9	1	2
10	2	1

Sample Thank You Letter



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

[Insert date]

[Insert Name of candidate/presenter and address]

Dear [Insert name of candidate/presenter],

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine and our co-sponsor, the [Insert name of co-sponsoring organization] thank you so much for participating in our Candidates/Issue Forum [insert date and location].

We are grateful for the opportunity to present programs that give voters an opportunity to meet [candidates in person] [learn about questions of importance to voters] and to hear a discussion of meaningful public policy issues. We couldn't do it without your cooperation.

You did a great job, and those who were there got a good chance to see where you stand on some of the key questions facing our state and our local community.

Thanks again for taking time in this busy campaign season for this worthy effort.

[Insert Name]

[President, or other LWV contact]

LWVME

Sample Script

Script prepared by League of Women Voters and provided to Moderator

- ✦ Welcome to the League of Women Voters Candidate/Issue Forum on the topic of _____.
- ✦ This event is sponsored by the League of Women Voters and co-sponsored by [insert name of co-sponsoring organization].
- ✦ *The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. The League of Women Voters is strictly nonpartisan; it neither supports nor opposes candidates for office at any level of government. At the same time, the League is wholeheartedly political and works to influence policy through advocacy.*
- ✦ Any event sponsored by the League of Women Voters will be conducted with the utmost respect for neutrality and nonpartisanship. Our intention is to conduct a public event with fairness and even-handedness.
- ✦ [Introduce the co-sponsoring organization including their mission statement or organizational description]
- ✦ Thank you all for attending this evening's presentation. We look forward to a lively discussion of issue important to voters.

Before I introduce the panelists, let me review the ground rules for tonight's event.

- ✦ Campaign and other literature has been placed on a table at the back of the room for any of you who are interested.
- ✦ No literature may be distributed to the audience by candidates or their agents.
- ✦ Panelist responses will be timed by League volunteers. Serving as our timers this evening are _____.
- ✦ Each panelist will have ____ minutes to make opening statements. They have drawn for the order in which they will speak. After the opening statements, candidates will take questions and will alternate speaking first.
- ✦ Panelists will then take questions from the audience. Responses to these questions will be limited to ____ minutes.
- ✦ Members of the audience are asked to submit questions on index cards. Questions will be consolidated by volunteers and posed by the Moderator. Not all questions will be asked. They will be grouped by topic, so that a range subjects may be covered in the time frame allowed for the forum. A question

may be posed to a single panelist, but the other panelist will be given an opportunity to comment or respond.

- ✦ Finally, each panelist will be given _____ minutes to present a closing statement. Once again, they have drawn for the order in which they speak.
- ✦ Now, let me introduce the panelists/candidates.



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.
- 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 are 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.
- Banners or signs that support or oppose either candidates or issues are not allowed in the meeting room.