

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS (LWV) CANDIDATE FORUM GUIDELINES

A candidate forum can be an excellent format to educate voters about the candidates. Forums require planning and may be organized most effectively in cooperation with other groups. Broadening the sponsorship can increase attendance and create wider participation. From LWV's perspective, co-sponsors must be non-partisan and key participants, especially the moderator, should not be publicly aligned with a candidate. To be a League-endorsed forum, the moderator and preferably one of the screeners, must be League sanctioned.

1. Forum Confirmation

- a. Begin Checklist for Candidate Forums (Att. 1) to assign and keep track of tasks.
- b. Get approval from sponsor for date (confirm possible open date(s) with candidates), location and reimbursement for incidental expenses (duplication, space rental, refreshments, etc.).
- c. Invite co-sponsors, if appropriate; if LWV is one, await confirmation letter (Att. 2); share tasks.
- d. Reserve location (estimate attendance).

2. Invitation to Candidates

- a. Invite all candidates; they must have filed an Intent to Run form (to control for last minute write-in candidates). Get contact information from the County Registrar of Voters (www.sdvote.com) or office handling the election; transpose to Att. 1.
- b. Draft letter to include the items listed in Att. 3.
- c. Confirm acceptances by email or phone (note on Att. 1).

3. Forum Logistics

- a. One month before event, develop, duplicate and distribute flyer, (Att. 4)
- b. Draft press release and email at least 2 weeks before event (Att.5)
- c. Assign purchase of water for candidates (refreshments are optional).
- d. Assign room set-up for forum (Att. 6)
- e. Confirm participation of moderator, who should not be a resident in the candidates' district
- f. Recruit two screeners, two pages and a timekeeper
- e. Develop agenda for forum (Att. 7)

4. Choose Format of Questions

- a. Written questions from the audience is the most common format. They are:
 - Pre-screened for appropriateness and applicability to the office being sought and addressed to all candidates
 - Grouped by audience interest to assure popular topics are asked within the time allotted.
 - Combined and edited for clarity and focus
 - Less successful for people with limited English or writing skills

- b. Verbal questions require additional considerations (are not the League's preferred format and may be a challenge for the moderator):
- Designate the area where the questioners should line up if the forum is well-attended; otherwise determine some method of choosing the sequence for questions (by row); first one side, then the other, etc. so as not to appear biased towards individuals in the audience.
 - In a large group, provide a mike on the floor and station a screener there to preview and/or help questioners write questions while the questioners are standing in line.
 - Screener works quietly with the questioner to assure the question is appropriate and/or applicable to all candidates.
 - In a small group, the moderator calls on the questioner. If the question is out of line, moderator may say, for example, "I'm sorry, I don't feel that is an appropriate question." Or, to candidate(s): "The question may not be appropriate--please feel free to decline to answer."
 - When questions are not pre-screened, moderator should advise candidates in advance that they are not required to answer any questions they feel are inappropriate.
 - Other methods of handling questions are acceptable, providing they are well-planned and give complete fairness to the candidates and are easily controlled by the moderator.
- c. Questions from a panel of community residents is also an effective format:
- Meet ahead of time to write a broad range of acceptable questions to educate voters more effectively and avoid any appearance of bias; avoid giving them to candidates in advance
 - Make sure questions are to the point and focussed: Lead with a relevant fact about the issue to establish the importance to the candidate and then ask the question.
 - Time permitting, may include more comprehensive background information, which can serve to educate the candidates.
 - Have a mix of open-ended vs. yes/no questions: Open-ended questions allow candidates to freely characterize their positions, which can provide insight into their priorities and overall perspectives on the issues; Yes/No ones are effective to get positions on a specific issue.

5. Roles

- a. Moderator:
- To greet and welcome the candidates (and maybe the audience), explain procedures, direct questions to the candidates in order and keep answers within the established time limits.
 - To set the tone for the event: should be slightly formal, but friendly; respectful of the candidates but firm in applying the ground rules; impartial at all times.
 - To have a reasonable level of general knowledge about the issues, enough to facilitate the exchange of information between the candidates and the audience - not provide it.
 - To determine the order of opening and closing statements
 - To introduce timekeepers, question sorters/screeners and pages
 - To be in charge of forum: to make whatever decisions are appropriate to keep control, while being helpful to the candidates and the audience, and to decide when questions screened out are appealed.
 - To thank at the end of the forum the candidates for participating and the audience for coming.
- b. Pages
- To assist the audience by passing out index cards and pencils and collecting written questions
 - To identify questioners needing help with wording and referring them to the screeners.

c. Sorters/Screeners:

- To assist the moderator and audience by collecting written questions from the audience and consolidating like questions
- To feed questions to the moderator, ranging in subject
- To eliminate questions that are unclear, hostile, of a personal nature or inappropriate to the office.
- To put aside questions for specific candidates until there is one for each candidate.

d. Timekeepers

- To assist the moderator with keeping the answers within the established time limits
- To help the moderator track the format and order
- To make sure that the moderator has briefed the candidates on the timing procedure
- To keep track of the time and hold up cards at 1 minute, 30 second and Stop intervals.

6. **Moderator's Format During Forum**

- a. Before forum begins, choose some method (numbers, cards, flip a coin) to determine the order of opening statements. The order is reversed for closing statements.
- b. Open the forum or be introduced if someone else opens it.
- c. Describe agenda (Att. 7), and introduce participants (or ask each one to introduce him/herself when making opening statement).
- d. Read moderator's statement to audience (Att. 8) and begin opening statements, reminding candidates of time restrictions.
- e. Start question period (or refer to panel), reminding candidates of the time allowed for responses.
 - Read question and ensure that each candidate has the opportunity to be the first one to answer as the questions progress (See Atts. 9 and 10).
 - Keep the forum moving to ensure each candidate has equal time; may need to remind candidates of time restrictions, repeat the format or even interrupt them gently by saying, "I'm sorry, your time is up."
- f. When question period has elapsed, call for closing statements and repeat that the order has been pre-determined.
- g. Close meeting or call on other designated person to do so and thank candidates and the audience for their participation and efforts to foster an informed electorate.

LWV Letterhead

To:
Organization:
Phone:
Fax:
Date:

Thank you for contacting the League of Women Voters of San Diego to assist you in your upcoming forum. As you are probably aware, the League is a non-partisan organization committed to encouraging people to be educated voters. Our role in your forum will be to assure fairness to all candidates and to the audience.

We have an established format that has withstood the test of time in conducting successful forums. So that we can schedule our member resources, we look forward to receiving your confirmation at least fourteen (14) days prior to the event. Your confirmation will indicate that you agree to conform with the "League of Women Voters of San Diego Candidate Forum Guidelines."

As explained in the Guidelines, you may publicize that the League of Women Voters of San Diego will moderate the forum. We request that you send all fliers, news releases, etc. that include the name of the League to me for our approval prior to publication.

If you would like us to publicize your forum in our monthly newsletter, The Voter, please submit a brief article to me by the 10th of the month for publication in the next month's issue. The Voter is distributed to all of our members around the first of each month.

To help our organization continue to provide these types of services, we request that you send a minimum donation of \$75 made out to the League of Women Voters of San Diego. Please mail your check to the League office @ 4901 Morena Blvd. Bldg. 100, Suite 104 San Diego, CA 92117

Thank you for the effort you are putting into organizing this forum – we share your belief that this is an important community service. We are committed to working with you to make this a successful and credible forum. Please feel free to contact me, or your assigned moderator, to discuss League format, procedures or set-up. We're here to help you!

Sincerely,

SAMPLE INVITATION/CONFIRMATION TO CANDIDATES

Dear _____

We would like to invite you to participate in ** a forum of candidates running for the ___District City Council (or whatever this is a forum for) seat on (date & time). The forum will be held at _____.

(OR: this will confirm our telephone conversation regarding your participation in --continue from the **).

This forum will be conducted according to the guidelines of the League of Women Voters of San Diego who will also moderate, time and screen questions from the audience. Candidates must appear themselves and may not send an alternate. There will be no literature or hand-outs in the hall, but a table will be provided in the lobby for the candidates use.

The format for this forum will include a two minute opening statement, one minute to answer each question by each candidate and a one minute closing statement. Although candidates will be seated alphabetically, a drawing will be held to establish the order of opening and closing statements.

(If this is the first contact): Please confirm your willingness to participate in this forum by calling_____. We look forward to working with you in this educational endeavor.

Thank you for your consideration.

(
If this is a confirmation): We look forward to working with you in this educational endeavor. If you have any questions, please call me at _____.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

S A M P L E

**CITY COUNCIL DECISIONS AFFECT
PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE, JOBS, AND OUR NEIGHBORHOODS**

FIND OUT HOW THE CANDIDATES STAND ON IMPORTANT ISSUES

COME WITH QUESTIONS

COUNCIL DISTRICT 3 CANDIDATE FORUM

Invited candidates:

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2007
6:30 - 8:30 PM**

**JOYCE BEERS COMMUNITY CENTER
(STREET ADDRESS)
SAN DIEGO, CA 92103**

**SPONSORED BY:
HILLCREST TOWN COUNCIL**

**MODERATED BY
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SAN DIEGO**

For more information, please contact:

Nancy _____, (619) _____, email: _____

Insert sample press release

ROOM SET-UP

1. **Candidates:** Seat at tables center stage. Give them elbow room and drape tables. Place a glass/bottle of water at each place and name placard large enough to be read from audience. Provide microphones (one per candidate is desirable).
2. **Moderator:** Place separate podium or table left or right of stage with own microphone . Orient podium so moderator and candidates can see each other and the moderator and audience and timer can see each other, too. No placard for moderator is required.
3. **Screeners:** Place table with two chairs directly below or behind the moderator but not on the stage. This allows the screeners to hand moderator the questions and even speak to him/her, if necessary.
4. **Timer:** Seat timer front and center of candidates. Equip with stop watch and timing cards.
5. **Pages:** Supply with pencils and index cards to pass out and retrieve.
6. **Supplies and Equipment:**
 - P.A. system
 - Forum Kit (LWV brings this; it contains index cards, pencils, yellow marker, stopwatch, bell, timing cards, deck of cards)
 - Name placards
 - Agendas
 - Table drapes
 - Ice water (don't forget the moderator)
 - Table for campaign literature: place at back of room or in entryway. No signs are allowed in hall; no literature or give-aways may be placed on seats.
 - Table for refreshments, as needed.
 - LWVSD banner or podium banner

S a m p l e

**SAN DIEGO CITY 3rd DISTRICT COUNCIL
CANDIDATE FORUM**

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2007

AGENDA

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 6:30-6:40 | Audience submits written questions - |
| 6:40 - 6:45 | Welcome - Hillcrest Town Council |
| 6:45 - 6:50 | Forum Format - LWV Moderator |
| 6:50 - 7:05 | 2 Minute Opening Statements - 7 candidates |
| 7:05 - 8:15 | Questions from Audience - 1 minute response per candidate |
| 8:15 - 8:30 | 2 minute Closing Statements - 7 candidates |
| 8:30 | Closing - Hillcrest Town Council |

CANDIDATE FORUM FORMAT MODERATOR'S INTRODUCTION TO AUDIENCE

1. This is a forum for _____. We are using the League of Women Voters' format for it. Please hold ALL applause until the debate is finished. There are many here who favor one person and if we applaud each as they speak, we will have less time for questions to be answered. At the end, we can give all (or both, if only two) candidates a rousing round of applause.
2. Candidates will have 2 minutes each for their opening statement, 2 minutes each for closing, and 1 minute to respond to each question from the audience. A timekeeper will keep track of the time raising cards when there is 1 minute and 30 seconds left. (Ask timekeeper to raise cards.)
3. Pages are passing out index cards and collecting your written questions and giving them to the screeners. Caveat: Word your questions in a general way so all candidates can respond to them. Otherwise, questions directed at only one candidate won't be asked unless there are the same number of questions specifically directed to each of the other candidates. The screeners can assist you with the wording or writing of questions, if needed.

The screeners group questions into categories of a similar nature and give me a representative one to ask. The purpose of this is to sort out duplicate questions, assure topics of greatest interest are asked within the time available and put personal questions aside. Also, questions that are inappropriate for the branch of government involved in this forum will be set aside. For example, a question about school facilities would not be appropriate for City Council candidates, but joint use of school and City facilities would be.

4. Candidates are seated in alphabetical order and have drawn a number to determine their order for opening statements. The order is reversed for closing statements. They will answer questions in:
 - a.. Seating order (Att 9). For example, Ms. _____ will begin with question (Q)#1, Mr. _____ will begin with Q#2, or (moderator decides)
 - b. Random order (Att. 10) so the same person doesn't follow the same person every time. For example, with 3 candidates, the person seated first will answer Q1 first, candidate #2 will answer Q3 first and candidate #3 will answer Q2 first.
5. The two screeners are _____ and _____, the timekeeper is _____ and the pages are _____. Are there any questions about the format or evening?

Let's get started with opening statements. The candidate drawing the lowest card is _____.

CANDIDATE FORUM QUESTION ORDER

Forum

Date

1. Candidates should be seated in alphabetical order and draw a number to determine their order for opening statements (OS). The order is reversed for closing statements, i.e., .g., the 3rd person in alphabetical order draws #1 and will be the first for opening statements, seat #5 is next, and seat #8 is last. Seat #8 is first to give a closing statement.
2. Candidates will answer questions in seating order, e.g., the person 5th in alphabetical order will be the first to answer Q5, seat #6 will answer next and seat #4 will answer last. Number each question and note "1" (1st) in the box correlating to seating order. Repeat the cycle if there are more questions than the number of candidates.

Sample OS	OS Order	Candidate Names	Seating Order	Q#1	Q#2	Q#3	Q#4	Q#5	Q#6	Q#7	Q#8	Q#9	Q10
8			1	1								1	
5			2		1								1
1			3			1							
4			4				1						
2			5					1					
3			6						1				
7			7							1			
6			8								1		

Random Order Options for Asking Questions By the Number of Candidates

CANDIDATE #1	CANDIDATE #2	CANDIDATE #3
1ST	3RD	2ND
2ND	1ST	3RD
3RD	2ND	1ST

CANDIDATE #1	CANDIDATE #2	CANDIDATE #3	CANDIDATE #4
1ST	3RD	2ND	4TH
4TH	1ST	3RD	2ND
2ND	4TH	1ST	3RD
3RD	2ND	4TH	1ST

CANDIDATE #1	CANDIDATE #2	CANDIDATE #3	CANDIDATE #4	CANDIDATE #5
1ST	3RD	2ND	4TH	5TH
2ND	1ST	3RD	5TH	4TH
4TH	5TH	1ST	3RD	2ND
5TH	2ND	4TH	1ST	3RD
3RD	4TH	5TH	2ND	1ST

CANDIDATE #1	CANDIDATE #2	CANDIDATE #3	CANDIDATE #4	CANDIDATE #5	CANDIDATE #6
1ST	3RD	2ND	4TH	6TH	5TH
2ND	1ST	3RD	5TH	4TH	6TH
5TH	6TH	1ST	2ND	3RD	4TH
6TH	2ND	4TH	1ST	5TH	3RD
3RD	4TH	5TH	6TH	1ST	2ND
4TH	5TH	6TH	3RD	2ND	1ST

For more than 6 candidates, combine rotations for 3 and 4 for 7 candidate forums; with 8 candidates, double the chart for 4 candidates, making the second bunch, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th. etc.