



League of Women Voters of New Mexico

Policy on Candidate Forums

Adopted March 19, 2011; Revised January 5, 2013

LWVNM's goal is to allow certified candidates for electoral offices to participate in forums moderated by the League where they have an equal and fair opportunity to respond to questions from the public. League forums may be held in physical locations and/or on TV or radio. This policy documents the criteria and parameters for conducting candidate forums run by LWVNM, one or more local Leagues, or with other non-partisan organizations. All forums conducted with partner organizations must follow League guidelines.

Candidate forums for statewide office, such as U.S. Senate, Governor, Lt. Governor, or Secretary of State will follow this policy. Candidate forums for local offices, including NM State Senate, House of Representatives, NM Commissions, are handled by local Leagues, and guidelines may change to accommodate local requirements.

All candidates representing recognized parties and whose names are on the ballot will be invited to participate in forums. Dates are scheduled with the major party candidates and announced well in advance. If they wish to participate, minor party and write-in candidates have to comply with scheduled forums.

If one of the major party candidates declines to participate in a forum for a statewide office or has to cancel, the forum (or section of the forum if for multiple races) will be cancelled or rescheduled to a time when both major party candidates can attend. A certified minor party candidate or write-in candidate who cannot attend may submit an opening statement that only the League moderator will read aloud.

If time permits, unopposed candidates for single local offices may be allowed to make statements in the interest of introducing themselves and educating the audience about their position. No time will be allotted for audience questions and answers.

Preparations and invitations: The League sponsoring the forum designates a Forum Committee and moderator who develop guidelines for the conduct of the forum. Candidates are invited via a letter or an email (not just by phone). This written communication makes clear that the candidates' acceptance of the invitation indicates their acceptance of the guidelines for the conduct of the forum and restrictions, such as placement of campaign literature outside the room where the forum is conducted. The forum is widely promoted so as to attract as many potential voters as possible.

Opening statements and remarks: At the forum, the candidates are individually welcomed by the moderator and/or members of the Forum Committee. During the opening remarks, the moderator explains the adopted guidelines to the audience and mentions that the candidates have agreed to the guidelines. The candidates are then asked to make brief, introductory remarks about themselves and their candidacy. These remarks are timed, and each candidate is allocated the same amount of time, usually from 1-3 minutes, depending on the number of candidates present and the length of time available. Every effort is made to stay within the advertised duration of the forum.

The Forum Committee may compose a few questions for the candidates to use at the beginning and/or end of the event as needed.

Questions from the audience: The League generally requests that questions from the audience be submitted in writing before or during the forum. Members of the Forum Committee distribute 3x5 cards and pencils at the entrance to the forum room. The audience is told that the questions are usually addressed to all of the candidates and, if addressed to a single candidate, the other candidates will be given equal time to answer. Extra cards are available if they raise their hands. The moderator explains that the cards are collected, reviewed, and consolidated by League members and partners to ensure that the questions are neither offensive nor repetitive and cover a fairly broad spectrum of issues. If a major topic of local interest is not covered by any of the submitted questions, the reviewers may compose a question on that topic. The questions are then passed to the moderator, who presents them and asks the candidates to respond. The moderator varies the order of questioning to make sure that each of the candidates has an opportunity to go first and last.

Closing statements: Closing statements are optional but encouraged in order to give candidates an opportunity to have a few last words.

After the forum, the Forum Committee and moderator may conduct a debrief to review the event and determine what changes to the procedure or the venue arrangements, if any, should be made for future forums.

Appendix: Sample Script

Welcome to the _____ Candidate Forum, co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of _____ and the American Association of University Women (or other non-partisan organization if any) I'm _____, President (or other) of LWV __ . With me is _____ from AAUW (or other) who also welcomes you.

The League's mission is to enable voters to make educated election decisions. . . .(The moderator and the co-sponsor say a few words about their respective organizations.) If you would like to learn more or join either of these organizations, please look for the brochures near the door.

Thank you all for being here. Before we begin, I ask you to please remain as quiet as possible so that everyone may hear. Please hold your applause until the forum has ended so that the candidates will have all the time possible for getting their points across. Please turn off cell phones and pagers.

Thank you to _____ for hosting this event, and thanks to the many individuals who helped put on this forum. I want to give a special thanks to our Voter Services Chair _____ and assistants _____ for their work on this year's Voters' Guide and the candidate forums.

This forum is being recorded by K___ Radio or TV, which will be playing excerpts before the election.

Thank you for so much for coming out this evening. This is YOUR forum, your opportunity to get to know the candidates and hear their perspectives on important issues. There is never enough time to cover all the issues in a setting such as this, but with good questions we will learn a great deal about the candidates who are running for office. If you have a question to ask, please print it clearly on a 3"x 5" card. Please raise your hand for the question screeners _____ and _____ (*indicate these individuals*) if you have a card to submit or if you need another card. You are welcome to submit as many questions as you would like, but please use a separate 3 x 5 card for each question.

Each candidate will have up to two minutes to respond to each question. Every 30 seconds, our timekeeper _____ will raise a sign (*timekeeper demonstrates*) to indicate the time remaining. At two minutes, she will put up the STOP sign at which time the speaker can only finish the sentence.

We may be grouping and prioritizing your questions during the forum. If your questions are not addressed, feel free to contact candidates directly after the forum or at another time.

Each candidate will have three minutes for an introductory statement. The order of these initial statements was determined by lot. The first statement will be made by ___ running for District _____.

Introduce the remaining candidates for their turns.

Now read the first question, calling on the first candidate by name. When his/her time is up, proceed to the next candidate, by name, without repeating the question or making any comment.

Proceed through the questions, reminding the audience from time to time that they may submit additional questions. Vary the order in which the candidates are asked to respond to each question.

Allow enough time for concluding statements and announcements.

This is our last question before the candidates make their closing statements. We are sorry we could not get to all of the questions submitted, so please, if your questions have not been answered, speak with the candidates directly after the forum. We will now move to closing statements.

The candidates will have 2 minutes each to summarize their qualifications and positions. (*Reverse the order used in the opening statements.*)

Let's give a round of applause to our candidates for participating in this interesting and lively forum and, most of all, for their willingness to serve the public. (*Applause.*)

Thank you, Candidates, for your willingness to participate in the democratic process by running for office.

Please remember to look for the League Voters' Guide, which will be published on _____ in _____. There will be copies of the guides at the libraries, recreational centers, the County Clerk's office, and _____. You can consult our website www.lwv....org for more information on this election. And remember to vote on _____, *Election Day*, during early voting, which runs from _____ to _____, or by absentee ballot. Polling locations and other important voting information are in the Voters' Guide.

Thank you again for coming this evening and being part of our democracy.