
League of Women Voters of Illinois Voter Service Candidate Participation Policy

December 2022

The League of Women Voters of Illinois does not support or oppose any political party or candidate.

Criteria for Inclusion in Any League Voter Guide and League Materials:

In determining eligibility under the criteria, the burden of proof is on the candidate. In order to have information in any League voter guide and League materials, a candidate must meet the following criteria:

1. Must have publicly announced an intention to run for office.
2. Must be a legally qualified candidate for public office under the applicable local, state, or federal laws to hold the office sought, including the Illinois State Board of Elections.
3. Must have qualified to be included on the ballot.

Criteria for Participation in a Candidate Forum/Debate:

The purpose of a candidate forum/debate is to allow voters an opportunity to hear candidates discuss issues face-to-face, stimulate public interest in the race, and provide the candidates an opportunity to engage with their constituents.

The above voter guide criteria will also apply for candidates invited to a Primary/General/Consolidated Election forum/debate with these additions:

1. Must be legally qualified by the designated LWV forum response deadline.
2. For a Federal or Statewide Executive office candidate, the candidate must show evidence that a formal campaign is being waged. The existence of a public website, campaign office, campaign staff, campaign appearances, position papers, and fundraising are examples.
3. For a General Election, the candidate must win the primary election for his/her/their respective party for the office which is the subject of the forum/debate or be officially nominated by his/her/their political party for that office.

Definitions:

Debate : The Federal Election Commission(FEC) defines a debate as an event that includes at least two candidates; is staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another; and allows the candidates to appear concurrently, in face-to-face engagement, with opportunities to respond to each other.

Forum: A format other than a debate (as defined above) is an event in which ideas and views on issues are exchanged. LWV candidate forums traditionally involve questions submitted by attendees and or a forum committee, reviewed by question-sorters and read to the candidates by a LWV-trained moderator. The candidates are allowed to

respond to the questions, in a predetermined time frame, and do not engage with each other.

Legal criteria for holding a candidate forum/debate are dependent on the type of office a candidate is seeking.

Federal Offices: When one or more candidates for federal office (US Senator, US Representative) is on the ballot and only one candidate chooses to attend an LWV forum/debate, then no candidate for that office will be permitted to appear. This is in accordance with Federal Election Commission (FEC) rules and regulations. Under most circumstances, providing a platform for a federal candidate to address the public or providing information about a candidate is considered to be a contribution of "something of value," and thus subject to the contributions or expenditures limitations and prohibitions of the federal election laws.

Although no candidate forum/debate may be held, a League may notify the public of the reason a candidate chose not to participate.

In the context of a primary, at least two opposing candidates for the same political party nomination must agree to participate or the forum/debate will not take place.

LWVIL advises following the same federal office requirements for state, county, township and local office.

State and Local Office: When one or more candidates for state and local office is on the ballot and only one candidate chooses to attend an LWV forum/debate, our policy is to follow federal requirements and not sponsor, co-sponsor or participate in an "Empty Chair" forum/debate.

Though there are voters' concerns about Leagues not having events or being forced to cancel events due to candidates' unwillingness to participate, LWV cannot be involved in an "Empty Chair" forum/debate as there would be an appearance of being partisan. We acknowledge this is an unfortunate loss of an opportunity to educate the voters in an unbiased and nonpartisan manner.

It is advised that candidate invitation/ground rules convey:

1. A non-response or cancellation will be considered an unwillingness to participate.
2. A candidate's willingness or unwillingness to participate is considered public knowledge.
3. All RSVPs from candidates must be in writing(digital is acceptable) by the deadline date set forth in the invitation.
4. If a candidate says yes in writing (email or via signed ground rules), then backs out (or is a no-show), after the notification of a forum went public up to the night of the forum, then a local League has the option of allowing the candidate who did show up to make a statement, 3 minutes or less, of said candidate's positions.
 - a. If the statement contains attacks on their opponent, it will be interrupted and stopped, and the statement will not be aired on League voter guides, websites or social media such as YouTube, Facebook or Instagram.

- b. To preserve the League's nonpartisan status, for all candidate statement videos, a local League will preface the statement with an explanation why the statement is being allowed.
- c. For virtual forums, a local League has the option to cancel the event in its entirety with no candidate appearances.

Sponsorship of a Statewide or Federal Candidate Forum/Debate

LWVIL reserves the right to contact the candidates for statewide office (US Senator and State Executive offices) for the purpose of securing their participation in a candidate forum/debate or other voter service activities. Local Leagues are encouraged to have forums/debates for US Congressional races and to work with neighboring Leagues when districts overlap. Local Leagues are asked to notify LWVIL of their multi-League coalition prior to contacting candidates to avoid duplication.

Local Leagues must contact the LWVIL President or LWVIL Vice President/Voter Service Chair for permission to contact any statewide candidate. Permission is determined on a case-by-case basis. The two reasons for this are (1) to avoid confusion among local Leagues and (2) to eliminate confusing requests to the candidates.

Revised: 2010, 2016, 12/2017, 6/2018, 6/2019, 1/2020, 12/2020, 12/2022