

SECTION III: VOTER SERVICES MANUAL NJ LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Introduction

“In carrying out our mission of encouraging informed and active participation in government, the League of Women Voters continues to be key sponsors of candidate debates and forums. The League enjoys a high level of public trust in this area. We have a reputation for organizing a fair, balanced forum for candidates, encouraging voter participation, and providing non-biased and skilled moderators to facilitate. Our image as a League is enhanced when we perform this public service competently.

The public does hold the League in high regard for our work on debates, so it is important for local Leagues to follow best practices to ensure a fair and well executed debate or forum. This respected tradition also offers local Leagues wonderful opportunities to be visible with the public and to help strengthen the organization through inviting new members to join as a means of developing new leaders.”

Criteria for Moderators

“The League has a reputation for providing non-biased and skilled moderators. Moderators are expected to keep the meeting under control, manage the discussion with a light hand, and maintain order.

To be prepared for such a heavy responsibility, moderators must undergo training by qualified League trainers and be certified as a League Monitor.

To ensure that a forum is conducted in a non-partisan manner, the Moderator should not reside or vote in the community where the election is being held. While any member of the League can be a certified moderator, those who currently hold elected political

office may not moderate candidate forums for elected political offices. “

Format

Time constraints: allocate the time you have available so that each candidate will have an equal opportunity to speak and present their positions. Emphasize the question/response component. Ensure that there will be time for candidate responses to at least 6 issue questions from the audience. There should be an opportunity for every candidate to respond to each issue and to give each candidate a 30 second rebuttal if needed.

Carefully consider the time allocated to opening and closing statements. Two minutes is an adequate amount of time for a candidate to introduce him/herself and state a platform. Allow 1 to 2 minutes for each candidate to sum up and close. Three minutes may be desirable for opening or closing only when the debate is limited to 1 or 2 candidates.”

A letter of invitation will go out to each candidate one week before the debate reminding them of the date and time and location of the debate and:

- Format complete with timing for answers and rebuttal
- Request for opening and closing statements
- Inclusion of questions from League
- Moderator role
- Ground rules regarding use of videotape
- Request for confirmation of agreement from candidate