



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF VIRGINIA**

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## **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF VIRGINIA**

### **STATEWIDE DEBATE GUIDELINES**

Only a person qualified in accordance with Virginia law to have his or her name printed on the ballot will be invited to participate in LWV VA sponsored candidate events.

If the event is for statewide or national office (Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, U.S. Senator, or U.S. Representative) the LWV VA will require that candidates be significant candidates. A significant candidate has made a public announcement of the intention to run; has a campaign headquarters and staff; has issued position papers; has made campaign appearances; and, within 30 days of the event, has shown at least a 15% ranking in a major, nonpartisan poll. If requested, the candidate must provide proof of meeting the above conditions.

If the LWV VA Board should choose to organize itself for debate planning purposes for statewide elections, especially for senatorial and gubernatorial contests, the following should apply: 1) seed money in the LWV VA operating budget, and 2) appointment in January, of state-wide election years, a committee from the board to explore the possibility of holding a LWV VA sponsored debate.

1. Allow 6 to 9 months lead time for exploration and preliminary planning. LWV VA budget should include a minimum of \$1000 for seed money to investigate debate possibilities.
2. Members of a preliminary planning committee, to include Voters Service, Development and Public Relations Chairs, should be appointed in January. Board should set a date for the planning committee to report on preliminary responses from possible candidates, availability of funding, recommendations for site and project director, at which time the board should make the final decision as to whether or not to proceed with a debate.
3. Upon identification of a debate location, the board appoints a project director and a steering committee to be composed of state board members and local League members from the debate area.
4. To facilitate a clear understanding between the State League and local League(s) in the area of the debate site, a memorandum of understanding as to the responsibilities of each should be developed after negotiations between the state League and the local League(s).
5. The steering committee is responsible for planning and implementation of the debate. It decides on goals; explores participation with all potential nominees; develops criteria for candidate selection; secures advisory committee; approves budget; secures funding and consultants; plans format, location and media coverage.
6. Total budget should be realistic for travel, telephone, publicity, etc. and should include TV transmission costs.

7. Development chair could consider requesting contributor to fund, specific items in the budget.
8. An advisory committee appointed in the early stages of planning has potential value in lending prestige and influence as well as fulfilling its advisory role dealing with funding, format, broadcaster, publicity, etc. One meeting is probably all that is necessary.
9. Consultants may be appointed as necessary. It is important to have on call an attorney familiar with communication law. A TV consultant and a political consultant might also be considered.
10. Negotiations with the candidates should be conducted :
  - a. by the Project Director and one or two members of the Steering Committee at a neutral site;
  - b. with a written debate package proposal presented to candidates as early as possible after nomination, to serve as agenda for the first meeting;
  - c. with the steering committee having decided what is negotiable and what is not;
  - d. by following up initial meeting with either an agreement ready for signing or a Memorandum of Understanding listing items that are still under negotiation, stating that those items that were agreed upon will not be open to further negotiation unless all parties agree, and asking for immediate response in writing as to available dates. If a second negotiating session is required, establish date at close of first meeting.
  - e. by certified mail in case of significant correspondence, agreements, and invitations.
11. Negotiations with the broadcaster (prime carrier): Develop an understanding of the prime carrier's responsibilities and record same in a memo of understanding. Transmission statewide should be secured early enough for publicity purposes to develop an audience.
12. Moderator and panelists need not be limited to reporters and commentators; columnists and academicians also should be considered. A well known moderator is a plus; use of a moderator only should be considered. (Refer to L WV US training material on format)
13. It is desirable to have a debate site that meets needs as a physical facility with TV coverage needs: a press room with TV monitors and telephone, dressing rooms for candidates, and seating for a live audience.
14. If invitations are used, they should be shared equally by each candidate and the League. Agreement on numbers should be in writing. Doors should close at announced time; 15 minutes before debate is probably enough unless prime carrier requires more time.
15. Media coverage should include initial press conference announcement and this may be sufficient unless controversy develops. Plans for publicity should be developed including op-ed pieces by consultants, letters to the editor, press releases, etc.
16. Formal acknowledgment should be given to all who contributed to the debate.
17. Report and evaluation from the steering committee and project director should be presented to board no more than 2 months after the event.