Moderating Candidate Events

Procedures and Techniques for Stress-Free Moderating
BEFORE THE EVENT

Who, in your League....
• Decides which events to participate in/plan?
• Deals with sponsoring or co-sponsoring organizations?
• Chooses the moderator?
• Chooses the date, place and duration?
• Handles publicity?
• Gets the media involved?
• Determines the format and rules?
• Organizes and brings the supplies?
• Makes and checks the audio/visual arrangements?
• Determines the room setup?
• Recruits the League personnel?
• Draws up the script/outline?
• Does the names cards, question grid, water, time cards, clocks, etc.?
• Handles the introductions?

Choosing the Moderator
The right moderator....
• does not have a personal relationship with a candidate involved
• is not well-known for their views on the issues involved
• feels s/he can behave in an impartial manner
• is experienced enough to handle the degree of complexity and possible pitfalls of the event
• is not a voter in that local district.

Becoming “The Right Moderator”
An “apprentice moderator”:
• Works at events in other roles
  o Reviews questions
  o Keeps time
  o Draws up the script, etc.
• Observes experienced moderators
• Moderates easier events:
  o Non-controversial
  o Few candidates
  o Very prescribed or very open formats

Choosing and Scripting the Format
• Your involvement as Moderator
• Involvement of the Sponsor
• Involvement of the Media
• Involvement of the Candidates and Campaigns
SAMPLE EVENT FORMATS

Candidate Engagement Periods:
- Opening Statement Period
- Question Period/Discussion Period
- Closing Statement Period

Opening Statement Period:
- 2-5 minutes
- Timed opening statements in drawn lot order
- May be the only thing you do.

Question Period
Types of Questions:
- Questions prepared and reviewed by the League in advance.
- Questions submitted in writing at the meeting and reviewed by the League before being passed to the moderator.
- Questions asked by the audience from the floor (limit the time) that can be ruled out of order by the moderator.
- Questions asked by a panel of questioners that can be ruled out of order by the moderator.
- Questions asked by the candidates of each other that can be ruled out of order by the moderator.

Questions Period: Target of Questions:
- Same question asked of each candidate (2 minutes); rotating response, using the question grid for support.
- Question asked of one candidate (2 minutes) with opportunity of opponents to respond if they wish (1 minute, or up to original responder’s time).

Question Period: Open “Cross-Talk” Period:
- Candidates discuss a given topic or question for a timed period (4 minutes)
- Period may immediately follow a timed question response on that issue
- Could be used for rebuttal or elaboration.

Question Period: “Cumulative Time”:
- Candidates answer questions, rebut, discuss and elaborate under a “cumulative time” rule.
- Candidates are timed as they speak by a timekeeper assigned to them and a cumulative time is kept.
- They may not exceed a total time for the debate, but may elect to use their time on questions on which they have a particular interest.
- In this format, there is more open exchange, and candidates can have more give and take on the issues.

Closing Statements:
- (2-5 minutes)
- Timed closing statements
- In drawn lot order (in reverse order if there were opening statements).
QUESTIONS: THE CHALLENGE

Rules about Questions
- Can be from the audience, panel, prepared, or a combination
- Pertinent to the office and the issues
- Not of a personal nature
- Not designed to attack a particular candidate
- Not repetitive or duplicative of material already covered
- Asked of all the candidates, or each candidate able to respond somehow
- Screened/approved somehow by the League or the moderator before candidates respond.

Rules about Questions from the Floor:
- Not an opportunity for a speech, personal history, editorializing, argument
- Remind long winded questioners that purpose of forum is to hear the views of the candidates
- Person should stand, state their names, use a mike if possible
- Person should state which candidate is being addressed (opposing candidate should be given opportunity to respond/comment)
- If all candidates are addressed by the question, rotate the order of answering such questions
- Encourage precision, brevity, simplicity
- No repeats until all have had a chance
- Question is addressed to you, and repeated by you for the candidates

YOU AND YOUR DEMEANOR

You should be:
- Absolutely neutral
- Fair but firm
- Considerate and respectful of the candidates and the audience.
- Dignified but relaxed.

Remember:
- Help the candidates to relax; they’re nervous.
- Humor is good.
- Smile.
- Be respectful, but you’re in charge.
- Be flexible. Things come up.
- The audience is not the enemy or children to be disciplined.
- You are there to serve the public interest, not the League’s, the candidates, or the media’s interest.

HOW TO COMBAT BUTTERFLIES

It’s natural and normal to be nervous.
- Use the energy.
- Deep breaths.
- Focus on the forum, not yourself.
HOW TO COMBAT BUTTERFLIES (cont’d)

- The audience won’t notice most signs.
- The audience wants you to do well.
- Don’t apologize for your nervousness.
- Imagine two hours from now.
- Think the entire evening through from how you’ll dress on. It helps.
- Imagine what can go wrong and imagine what you will do.
- Start and finish strong.
- Know what you’re going to say “first”.
- “Act”
  - Posture
  - Demeanor
  - Tone of voice

BE WELL PREPARED

Know the venue.
- Plan to get there early.
- Visit in advance if necessary.
- Plan and communicate the arrangement of the space.
- Plan for the audio equipment.
- Plan the speaker comportment (standing, sitting, in place, at the podium, etc.).

Know the forum.
- Prepare a script/outline.
- Have copies of the correspondence with the candidates.
- Know the planned time limits.
- Know who will staff the forum.
- Know the timekeeping procedures: Warnings? Cards? Bell? When/how often?.
- Know the rules and League policies on no-shows, party participation, stand-ins, etc.

Know the race.
- When, where, who can vote
- Title of the office(s)
- How many candidates running for how many slots for what term.

Know the candidates.
- Bios
- Who is/is not participating and why
- How to pronounce their names, how you will address them.

Other:
- Know the audience: estimated size and makeup, typical behavior.
- Know the issues: temper of the race, hot buttons.
- Anticipate audience questions.
- Anticipate the lack of audience questions.
- Anticipate things that can go wrong (timekeeper doesn’t show, no timepiece, no water.)
AT THE EVENT

Come early to check status of preparations.
Someone should make sure there’s:
- Podium, tables, chairs, set up correctly
- Water
- “League” branding (banners and buttons)
- League informative and membership materials
- Name cards for candidates
- Name tag for you

Meet with the Candidates
- Introductions
- Name pronunciation and titles
- Review the rules, time limits and timing procedures
- Draw lots (or you can do this in front of the audience)

If you’re working with a sponsoring organization or co-sponsor:
- They might want to do the introduction and wrap-up.
- Agree on the time allocated to that and the content.

Dealing with Media/The Media
- If the event is to be filmed, speak with the technician to see if s/he has any advisement or special needs.
- If you know that reporters are present, you can great them before the event and make sure they know of the League’s involvement and work on the public behalf.
- You are not, however, operating in the interest of the media.
SAMPLE MEETING OUTLINE / SCRIPT

1. Early event meeting with the candidates.

2. Mike arrangement and audio check.

3. Welcome and Introductions
   a. Optional welcome from the sponsor and/or League president
   b. Statement about the sponsoring organizations and their non-partisan nature.
   c. Introduction of the League moderator.
   d. Welcome from the League moderator.
   e. Statement about the League and its non-partisanship.
   f. Introduction of the League personnel that are helping with the event.
   g. Statement about the office for which the candidates are running.
   h. Statement about the race (how many candidates, for what term, what it takes to win).
   i. Statement about what candidates are not participating and why.
   j. Statement about how to vote in this election (when, where, how, absentee voting).
   k. Introduction of the candidates (names, not bio).

   a. Basic format
   b. Time limits
   c. Order of presentation
   d. Questions and questioning procedure
   e. Audience behavior
   f. Proscription of campaigning
   g. Total expected elapsed time

5. Introduction of each candidate for his/her opening statements.

6. Questions/Answers/Discussion

7. Introduction of each candidate for closing statements.

8. Wrap-up and Closure.
   a. Statement of broadcast schedule if relevant.
   b. Encourage the audience to encourage others to vote
   c. Invite people to join/support the League
   d. Close the meeting, and/or hand it back over to the sponsor.
MAINTAINING CONTROL

- Meet with the candidates before about format, rules and adhering to time limit (you WILL interrupt).
- State the rules for the audience.
  - Applause
  - Electioneering
  - Asking questions
- Place yourself where you can see the timer and address the candidates. Sit when they speak.
- Maintain access to/control over the mike.
- If there is a mike on the floor, have a person to control it.
- Watch the time keeper’s signals and interrupt a candidate that goes over time.
- You have the right to:
  - Call for a recess to deal with a candidate or audience member
  - Adjourn the meeting if it gets out of control
  - Call for security to remove a disorderly person.

HANDLING SITUATIONS:

Candidates that go over time:
“I’m sorry M________, but your time is up. M____________, we will now hear from you.”

Candidates that get obstreperous:
“M____________, you are out of order. You are not being fair to the other candidates.”

Disruptions/Hecklers
“Some of you in the audience are already committed to a candidate, but many are not. You don’t help your candidate with these interruptions.”
“Please sit down [and wait your turn, submit your question]. We are here to listen to the candidates. Please respect the rules we have established so that we may have an orderly discussion of the issues.”
Call a recess and speak to the heckler.
Call security to remove a truly disorderly person.
As a last resort, adjourn the meeting.

Audiences that get unruly:
“I would remind the audience that this is not a rally for voters that have already picked a candidate, but a non-partisan meeting for those that have not. Please don’t waste the time we have to discuss the issues.”

Questions that are really an attack:
“I will have to rule that question as out of order. We are here for an open, orderly exchange on the issues, not character assassination. May we have another question please.”

Questioners that want to argue with a candidate:
“We are here to listen to the views of the candidates. We may disagree, but we’re here to listen to them.”

Questioners that want to make a speech:
“Please phrase your statement as a question.”
**Broken Record Questions:**

“We should try to cover as many important subjects as possible. Are there any questions on another topic?”

**People demand to see the questions afterwards:**

Refuse them. Campaigns can abuse them, privacy may be violated. They are the property of the League. “I’m sorry but I have to refuse; but we have run into trouble in the past with parties misusing the questions.”

**OTHER RESOURCES**

- “Road to the Voting Booth: Part II”
  - [http://www.lwvny.org](http://www.lwvny.org)
- “Face to Face: A Guide to Candidate Debates”
  - [http://www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)
- Moderator’s Handbook: LWVM
  - [http://www.lwvma.org](http://www.lwvma.org)
- Maggie Moehringer, 475-0969
  - VP Voter Service, LWVNY