June 8, 2019

To: Local League Voters Service Chairs  
From: Mary Coltrane, LWVWA Voters Service Liaison  
Re: Attached Packet of LWVUS Materials

Welcome, Voter Service Chairs to Convention workshops focused on our voter service work!

As background for these workshops, and for the Plenary Panel discussion, I’ve pulled together several items from the LWVUS website. I hope you will find them useful. They are culled from the LWVUS’ plentiful information related to voter service, and are intended as reference for our discussions at the 2019 LWVWA convention.

There are three categories of information, relating to the three of the voter service areas we’re taking up at Convention

  - Voter Registration. From Voter Registration to Get Out the Vote and Beyond
  - Voter Service, General. Making Democracy Work: From Voter Service to Action and Back Again
  - A Deep Dive: Vote411 and Candidate Forums

The packet includes a key and brief description of each item, so you can see what it is, and find it on the LWVUS website. In some cases, the documents are truncated; see the website for full information.

I hope you will find this packet pulls together some key voter service information in a convenient manner.

Thanks!
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<td>This page highlights key elements of a voter registration drive, and links to additional information for planning a voter registration drive.</td>
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<td>This page discusses how each League should formulate a nonpartisan policy; basic elements and key points to consider. See site for full article.</td>
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<td>Guidelines for Leagues on Candidates Unwilling to Participate in Voter Education Opportunities</td>
<td>Here are some tips for getting candidates to engage, and links to additional useful info.</td>
<td><a href="https://www.lwv.org/league-management/elections-tools/guidance-leagues-candidates-unwilling-participate-voter-education">https://www.lwv.org/league-management/elections-tools/guidance-leagues-candidates-unwilling-participate-voter-education</a></td>
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2018 Voter Registration Best Practices

Watch our webinar overview of voter registration best practices for 2018!

For additional resources:

- Read our tips for hosting a voter registration drive
- Check out our scripts for get-out-the-vote (GOTV)
- Download our Youth Voter Registration training manual
- Read our tips for utilizing online voter registration at in-person events
- And sign your League up as a National Voter Registration Day partner!
Planning a Voter Registration Drive
MAGGIE BUSH
4/26/2018

Interested in planning a nonpartisan voter registration drive? The League of Women Voters has some expert tips!

BEFRIEND LOCAL EXPERTS
• Coordinate with organizations already doing voter registration in your community, such as your local League of Women Voters!
• Touch base with local elections officials to let them know your plans, pick up blank forms, and attend any offered trainings.

PICK THE RIGHT VENUE
• Aim to reach lots of people, especially those who might not already be registered to vote.
• Great locations include:
  ◦ Transit hubs/neighborhood gathering places
  ◦ Schools (high schools, community colleges, technical schools, vocational/alternative schools)
  ◦ Community/sporting events
  ◦ Places frequented by recent movers

KNOW THE LAW AND TAKE TIME TO TRAIN
• Voter registration rules differ from place to place, so make sure your volunteers are familiar with the federal and state laws that govern voter registration in your community. For more information, contact your local League of Women Voters, elections official or check out http://fairelectionsnetwork.com/resources.
• Be sure to keep registration drives nonpartisan, and take the time to practice your registration “pitch” with volunteers.

Positive and enthusiastic is the way to win over potential new voters.

PLAN AHEAD
Assign a volunteer or event leader to bring the following items to your event:
• Voter registration forms, clipboards, and collection envelope
• If applicable in your state, equipment to offer online voter registration (you can use VOTE411.org)
• Banner and signs, including “REGISTER TO VOTE HERE” sign
• Pencils and pens
• Information on/applications for absentee voting & other voting details for your state
(visit VOTE411.org for help)
• Sign-up sheets or pledge cards for voters to keep in touch with your group
• Extra forms for newly registered voters to share with their friends and family

PUBLICIZE!
• Reach out to your social networks and local media to let them know when and where you’ll be registering voters.
• If you’re able to reach out to potential registrants (such as at a school) ahead of time, alert them to any identification info required on your state’s voter registration form (such as a driver’s license number or social security number)
• After your event, report the results to your networks and local media, and THANK your volunteers!

AT THE EVENT
• Work the crowd. Make personal contact by walking up to potential registrants and asking if they need to register or update their registration if they’ve moved.
• Have a clear plan for how you’ll collect and return completed registration applications to the required elections official, being sure to follow any state requirements. Again, the best way to do this can be to team up with an experienced group like your local League of Women Voters.
• Have enough volunteers. While one person talks, others can assist individuals, collect forms, and help echo important messages!
• Quickly check all forms for completion. In particular, check to see that registrants have:
  ◦ Checked the box affirming they are over 18 (unless pre-registering).
  ◦ Checked the box affirming they are a US citizen.
  ◦ Provided any required identification number, usually their driver’s license number or some or all digits of their social security number.
  ◦ Signed and dated the form.
• Follow any and all rules regarding voter registration drives in your state.

FOLLOW UP
• Keep track of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of everyone you register by creating a spreadsheet or by photocopying registration cards, where permissible by law. You can also ask them to fill out a sign-up sheet or pledge card to receive election reminders from you.
• This information is key to following up with voters to provide helpful information about voting, and will also help your team maintain accurate records about your voter registration drives.
• Closer to election day, help get the new registrants out to vote by directing them to polling place or other critical election information (such as on VOTE411.org)
Power the Vote, Power the League:
Voter Registration and the MLD Best Practices
July 2012 Guidance on Opportunities

The League is known for our great voter service work. The public has come to expect us to register voters, get out the vote, and protect voters’ rights, and we deliver! This election season, we can do even more.

While powering the vote, we also can power the League to become more vibrant, strong, visible and growing! We need to strategically consider new ways to do the same voter registration work we’ve been doing for years. Small changes can make big differences for voters and for the League.

Use the questions and suggestions below to have an honest and thoughtful discussion of the local Leagues’ voter registration activities. Allow the local League to consider what they’ve been doing and how they can use their voter registration outreach to build the League in membership, leadership, and visibility.

What can we do differently?

- Where and when have you registered voters in the past? How successful was your voter registration activity (i.e. how many individuals did you register)? Where and when will you register voters this year?
- Are you reaching out to underrepresented communities (such as minorities, high school or college students)?
  - Reaching out to under-served populations can maximize your volunteers’ precious time, as you will most likely register more people in less time. Always go to the same library and register 2 people the whole day? Try going to a different location, such as a community college campus.
  - Are there partners who can help you reach out to these new communities? Who and how will you reach out to them?
  - Are there ways to continue to foster these relationships/partnerships beyond the election?

How are we speaking about the League?

- What language can your local League use to promote the League and your work that resonates with and is easily understood by the general public?
  - The word “nonpartisan” does not resonate with the general public. Instead, state repeatedly that the League “does not support or oppose any candidate for office.”
- How can you make it obvious that the League is still around and is registering voters this year?
- How can you convey how individuals can become more engaged or involved with the League?

How can we engage others?

- What small and concrete activities can people do to assist with this (spend 2 hours at the location doing registration, recruit a few friends to help, etc.)?
• Who can you ask within the League to volunteer with voter registration?
• Who outside of the League could volunteer with voter registration (such as students, friends, and allied organization members)?
• What allied organizations can you reach out to new underserved communities?
• How will you advertise your voter registration events? What media partners can reach out to? What role does new or social media serve?
• How will you work with local election officials? What information do you need from them to ensure your program runs smoothly?

**How will you follow up on your voter registration activities?**
• How will you keep track of your registrations (e.g., how many)?
• Are there ways to follow up with registrants (e.g., send them a link to Vote411 or SmartVoter)?
• How will assess your plan (i.e., how well did it work? Should this be replicated in the future)?
• How will you follow up with those that volunteered to see if they are interested in volunteering for other League activities?
• How will you appreciate and/or thank the volunteers or partner organizations that helped?

**Resources Available to You:**

*Power the Vote, Power the League. Summer Webinar Series*
Encourage your local League coordinators to register to participate in the first session of our *Power the Vote, Power the League* summer webinar series! This series is ONLY open to participating MLD local Leagues. Our first session will be on Thursday, July 12, 2012 at 2PM ET (1pm CT, Noon MT, 11am PT) and will be about infusing MLD best practices into voter registration activities.

*LWVUS Pass-Through Grants*
LWVEF is pleased to announce a new pass-through grant opportunity to help Leagues engage community college/technical/vocational school students and new citizens in 2012. State and local Leagues are encouraged to download the project description and funding application for fall 2012 activities. Contact Maggie Duncan (mduncan@lwv.org) if you have questions about completing your application. Sunday, July 15, is the application deadline.

*High School Voter Registration Kit*
This comprehensive training manual provides a step-by-step guide to help you develop winning high school voter registration programs and encourage young people to register and vote. The guide comes complete with field-tested tips and a range of planning, training, and outreach tools to help you succeed.

*Event/Activity Planning Checklist*
Use the event/activity planning checklist for your voter registration activities this year to ensure you are incorporating direct, media, and allied outreach, as well as leadership development into every activity. Don’t forget to think of ways you can follow up on this great work! Available in the MLD Handbook (in Chapter 3 or the “Tools you can Use” section of the binder).
National Voter Registration Day
The League is partnering with allied organizations across the country to participate in National Voter Registration Day on September 25, 2012. Consider planning a voter registration event on this day to be part of something big!
APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER

Answer the following questions about your League:

- Who engages with your League?
- How do you define engagement?
- Who else could benefit from our work?
- How does your League embody our mission?
- What’s the relationship between mission and impact?

GUIDANCE

This month, we want to go back to MLD basics: outreach. Who do we reach in our community? Who does our work touch? Who else could benefit from our work? Who could we benefit from working with?

A prime opportunity is voter registration and engagement. This assistance is especially needed in certain segments of our communities. According to the Voter Participation Center, as of 2012,

- 42 percent of young people between 18 and 29 who are eligible are not registered, representing 31 percent of all unregistered citizens.
- 41 percent of Latinos who are eligible are not registered, representing 16 percent of all unregistered citizens.

What’s more, millions of Americans miss voter registration deadlines or do not know they need to update their voter registration when they move, change their name, change parties, etc.

In addition, our changing election systems lead to questions from voters of all backgrounds. Voting law changes will affect how many Americans register and vote this year. As a leading organization not only fighting to make voting more accessible, but also get the word out to our communities about such changes, we have a key role to play in helping voters, especially those in traditionally underrepresented communities, navigate the process.

While these statistics are likely not new information to those of us who are so passionate about League and so committed to its mission, we wanted to raise them in the context of outreach and impact. What is the impact of our current outreach? What other outreach opportunities exist in our community?

These are questions that only individual Leagues, who know their own communities so well, can answer. But, regardless of the answer, it is useful to stop and ask the questions – to think about how we are most effective in doing our work.

Who better than the League of Women Voters...

Engaging our full community has many layers of benefit to our democracy and to ourselves as an organization.

The “greater good” is probably very obvious – we fundamentally believe that a more representative and engaged electorate that includes all viewpoints and...
Membership & Leadership Development (MLD) perspectives will lead to public policies that better reflect the needs of all communities.

For League, this type of outreach can have many benefits:

- **More impact!** We are fulfilling our mission in a tangible way by reaching those who need us most! A recent Independent Sector report estimates the value of volunteer time at $23.07 per hour (national average). We want to be sure that we putting that precious resource to use in way that is effective and fulfilling.

- **More personal fulfillment.** More important than dollars and cents, individuals want to know that their efforts “matter.” They want to be part of something larger than themselves and to put their talents to use in a meaningful way.

- **More diversity.** New voices and new ideas will be brought to the League.

- **More visibility.** New initiatives mean introducing new individuals to the League and our work. When our work is positive, effective and results-driven, the people of our communities, including local media, will take note.

- **More leadership opportunities.** These efforts could be discrete undertakings that offer great leadership development opportunities to members and volunteers.

**What does this look like?**

To reach out to new communities or populations, we use the same outreach best practices that we have been discussing over this past year:

- **Assess the opportunities.** Where are the needs in your community? Where does your League have some connections or ties that can be the start of a relationship? Or, how can they build a relationship? In short, find the “who.”

- **Partner with a “local” group already working within the community of voters you want to reach.** Research shows: Peer-to-peer voter engagement works!

- **Keep it relevant and personal.** In our outreach messages, tie voting to a hot issue in the community and frame it in a way that speaks to results.

- **Use Messages that work.** Use LWVUS’s tested messages to engage voters and encourage them to participate.

- **Engage them.** Keep outreach sessions/opportunities positive, brief and interactive.

- **Be prepared** for questions regarding the registration and voting process in your state.

Evaluate what works and make adjustments for the future.

**RESOURCES**

- [Engagement for Impact](#) (a webinar by the LWVUS Diversity Advisors)
- MLD Guidances on [Engagement](#) and [Allied Groups](#)
- [Empowering the Voters of Tomorrow](#) (LWVUS)

*Special thanks to the LWVUS Diversity Advisors for their input and review of this material.*
Developing and Implementing a Nonpartisan Policy

The choice made in 1920 to neither support nor oppose any political party or candidate for public office continues today to ensure that the League’s voice is heard above the tumult of party politics. The nonpartisan policy has added strength to the League’s positions on issues and has made possible wide acceptance of League voter service and other educational activities.

At the same time, the League is a political organization and encourages members to participate fully in the political party of their choice. It is an advantage to the League to have politically active members and, equally important, it can be a personally satisfying experience.

Each League’s board of directors is responsible for drafting and carrying out a nonpartisan policy in its community. In order to ensure the credibility of the League as a nonpartisan organization, the board also is responsible for seeing that both its members and the public understand the League’s nonpartisan policy.

Formulating a Nonpartisan Policy

Each League board should formulate a policy that best reflects existing conditions in its League, as well as the political climate and traditions in its community. The policy should include specific guidelines to govern the political activities of its board and off-board members.

The following are some basic elements that should be included in your League's nonpartisan policy:

- A statement of the nonpartisan nature of the organization,
- Guidelines on permissible activities for board members,
- Restrictions on certain board positions (e.g., president and voters service chair),
- A policy on how to handle resignations when a board member resigns to engage in political activity.

Key points to consider in this process include the following:

- The sensitivity or visibility of specific board assignments or functions,
- The extent to which the public identifies a board or off-board member’s activities with those of the League,
• The sensitivity or visibility of specific board assignments or functions,

• An overall assessment of the League’s credibility as an effective nonpartisan political organization in the community,

• The visibility associated with a specific political activity (such as participating in partisan social affairs, signing petitions, making campaign contributions, or serving as a campaign manager).

Since times and conditions change, it is essential that the board discuss its nonpartisan political policy annually and update it as necessary. The ideal time to review your League’s policy is at the orientation meeting for your new board, when you clarify the policy-making role of the board as a whole, as well as individual responsibilities. It is particularly important to review the nonpartisan policy before specific cases come up. Even if no changes are necessary, the review is important, both to educate board members and to anticipate situations that might cause difficulty later.

Party Affiliation

Board members usually have party affiliations and should certainly carry out the responsibilities of every voter in exercising the franchise, including the responsibility to become informed about candidates.

Elective (Public) Office

While board members generally may not run for elective office, the definition of what constitutes an elective office varies in our grassroots organization. For example, some New England town meetings consist of elected representatives, and League board members sometimes run for these offices. Members of charter commissions and delegates to state constitutional conventions are often elected, yet many Leagues allow board members to run in these elections. It is extremely difficult to make a blanket statement to cover all situations, especially since running for office is a natural outgrowth of League training. Each League, therefore, will have to decide on its policy and judge each situation as it occurs.

If a board member declares for an elective office other than one determined permissible by the League, the board decides when the member should resign from the board. The wording of the public notice of the resignation should, if possible, include the name of the person succeeding to the board position and should avoid the appearance of endorsing the resigning board member’s candidacy. Resigning from the board does not mean resigning from the League, nor does it mean that the board member cannot serve on the board later on; the board decides when that is appropriate. Another possible option is for the person to take an off-board position if there is a specific project or activity that still needs their contribution.

(See LWVUS site for remainder of information on the site; truncated here to save trees.)
August 2014 Guidance on Opportunities: Voter Service as a Membership Opportunity

APPRECIATIVE ICEBREAKER
Think about this quote from LWV founder Carrie Chapman Catt:

*Everybody counts in applying democracy.*

- How does that speak to your League’s voter service work?
- What are your League’s voter service goals for this fall?
- What are the opportunities and challenges associated with these goals?
- What are the options to achieve the goals?
- What can each member of your team commit to this effort?
- How do these goals relate to building your League’s capacity?

**How can we leverage our voter services work to power the League?**

In today’s political climate, it is becoming increasingly hard to find nonpartisan, factual information, and voters are craving authentic solutions. The League is needed more than ever! We have the ability to leverage our League voice and promote focused, quality work. As we capitalize on this critical year in a unified way, the voters win and so does the League. Imagine a well informed electorate and a vibrant, growing League!

When we provide the public with the information they’re looking for, not only does our work speak for itself, but we also create opportunities to talk with people about getting involved with the League. As you look at your 2014 voter service activities, ask yourselves how can my League best:

- Emphasize the role of the League in educating and informing voters?
- Emphasize the League’s commitment to providing nonpartisan, fact-based information about candidates and issues to help voters make their own decisions?
- Always include a “Join Us” message in your voter education/registration efforts?
- Think about the allied organizations with whom to partner and the media outlets to promote and advertise events and good work?
- Engage members in volunteering at your events and starting to hone their leadership skills?

**Connecting with the Community:**

- **Get the most bang for your buck.** Reach out to underrepresented populations, such as young people, minorities, low-income individuals, and new citizens as they are most likely to need help registration, getting informed about candidates, and navigating Election Day—especially in places where new barriers have been erected that will make it harder for them to participate. You’ll be helping those most in need while registering more voters and providing needed information and assistance to those who can’t find it elsewhere. Think about who in your community might be the most passionate about joining a group who cares about their engagement in these important elections and invite them to participate in League events!

- **Engage young people to volunteer** and be a part of the democratic process. We can
engage people to volunteer without asking them for a check and without needing them to become a member right away. Want to do more great work but are strapped for volunteers? See if college students or young professionals are interested in helping. These individuals thrive on easy, one-time, volunteer opportunities and we CAN provide them! In the long run, we’ll become more visible, we’ll be able to do more of our great work, and we’ll have a slew of potential future members on our hands.

Resources Available to You:

- Event/Activity Planning Checklist
- Elections Checklist (in Chapter 4 of the Handbook)
- The 2012 Voter Registration Best Practices Webinar
- [www.Vote411.org](http://www.Vote411.org)
- [The YPTF Toolkit](http://www.Vote411.org)
- LWVUS Elections Team:
  - Jeanette Senecal – Senior Director, VOTE411 and oversight of all programs (jsenecal@lwv.org)
  - Maggie Duncan – Program Manager, voter registration & education, redistricting, and youth engagement (mduncan@lwv.org)
  - Tim O’Brien – Project Manager, Public Advocacy for Voter Protection project (tobrien@lwv.org)
  - Megan Brown – Elections Coordinator, VOTE411 and other programs, general support for members and the public (mbrown@lwv.org)
Voters Service and Citizens Information

The League’s Voter Services and public education activities provide information about public issues, including those on which we have a position. Voter services activities are designed to provide citizens with unbiased, factual information that can be used as a basis for reaching their own decisions.

Over the years, the League has built an excellent reputation for providing the public with accurate, nonpartisan services and information on elections and on governmental and public policy issues. The League’s voter services activities are designed to provide citizens with unbiased, factual information that can be used as a basis for understanding the election process and reaching their own voting decisions. The League’s citizen education activities, on the other hand, provide information on public issues, including those on which we have a position; by law and League policy, it is not necessary to present both sides of an issue in such situations. In other words, Leagues may educate the public about a particular point of view or “side” of an issue (e.g., a League could hold a forum about why the death penalty should be abolished without including experts/panelists in support of capital punishment).

It is the responsibility of the board of directors to ensure that voter services activities and lobbying activities are kept clearly separate. Voters’ guides and other voter services materials must not contain statements of League positions, and League positions on ballot issues must not be discussed at voter services events. A reader or candidate should not be able to “guess” the League’s position based on the wording of a question.

Educational activities may be funded with either operating funds or tax-deductible monies—either through direct sponsorship or through grants. (See below for information about conducting membership recruitment at educational programs and tax considerations.) If tax-deductible monies are used, there are IRS regulations that must be strictly followed. If the event is an election event, then additional regulations from the FEC and FCC (if broadcast) must be followed. Some recommended publications on the legal aspects of voter services work are Face to Face: A Guide to League-Sponsored Debates (published by the LWVEF) and The Rules of the Game (published by The Alliance for Justice), as well as IRS publications.

Voter Services

Leagues carry out a variety of election-related services, which may include:

- Making registration and voting information available through a variety of means, including a Web site (www.VOTE411.org).
- Organizing voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns that target groups that have traditionally not participated in elections.
- Publishing voters’ guides/candidate questionnaires, often in foreign languages as well as in English.
- Sponsoring candidate meetings, debates and interviews.
- Providing speakers on election issues, such as voting procedures and ballot measures.

Candidate Meetings/Debates

Sponsoring candidate debates requires careful decision-making by the whole board to protect the League’s nonpartisanship. Leagues are strongly advised to adopt careful, objective candidate participation criteria before each
election season gets underway and before the candidates are known (e.g., at the League’s January board meeting). For example, the League might require evidence that a formal campaign is being waged, i.e., existence of headquarters, campaign staff, issuance of position papers and campaign appearances. Such criteria can then be used to determine which candidates are eligible to participate in the League’s debate, should the League choose not to invite all candidates.

A League may stage a debate even if some invited candidates decline to appear as long as the debate is not televised and more than one candidate for a given office appears. FCC regulations require that a debate sponsor not proceed with a debate unless at least two candidates for the same office appear at the same event. Some states may have comparable requirements for state and local elections. Leagues should refer to the Guidelines for State and Local Debates including “empty chair” debates (on the League Web site) and the LWVEF publication Face to Face for step-by-step guidance on legal requirements and technical considerations in staging candidate debates. Sample candidate participation criteria also are available on the League Web site.

Working with Other Groups or Allied Organizations

In providing voter information, Leagues often work with the media and other organizations that endorse candidates. In deciding how to work with such groups, a League needs to consider carefully how its participation might affect its nonpartisan status or the public’s perception of the League’s nonpartisanship. The board must make sure that the ground rules are set to ensure that the activity is conducted in a strictly nonpartisan manner. It also is important to make clear that the League cannot waive its nonpartisan policy or any procedures that ensure fair treatment of candidates. The same is true when a League cooperates with a newspaper or other media outlet to produce or distribute election information. Guidelines for broadcast events should include a prohibition on airing selected portions of the event by either the candidates or the media.

Public Information

Observer Corps

Observer Corps are a structured way for individuals to exercise their right to know. They provide a valuable service to the community. They help ensure that citizens are aware of the decisions that impact their lives and they promote government transparency and accountability.

An observer is an individual who attends a governmental meeting, notes what happens at the meeting, and reports back to the League and through the League to the community. By attending public meetings of local governmental bodies/agencies, observers learn more about what their government is doing. They learn about the issues facing their community and are empowered to take action, if warranted. They also learn how issues are being addressed.

Observers keep elected and appointed officials on notice; they let them know that someone is watching what decisions are being made and how they are being made. They help ensure that the issues facing their community are being handled “in the sunshine,” in the open. Ideally, observers are monitoring both the issues being discussed as well as the process by which they are being discussed. While not every item up for discussion will relate to a League’s priorities, ensuring that the meeting is being conducted in an open and acceptable way is critical to all of the League’s efforts and the health of our democracy.

Observer programs are not vehicles for individuals to work personal or partisan agendas. Observers generally do not “act” on issues in these meetings unless serving as a designated spokesperson for the League, observers should not provide commentary or testimony on issues on behalf of the League. Instead, observers attend meetings to gather information. Through the process, their presence encourages better, more transparent government.

Public Education Year-Round

Public education encompasses all of the other issue-related or process-related activities that Leagues undertake to help members and the public understand and participate in government and politics.
For example, the League can sponsor or cosponsor meetings on government operations, the political process, or a hot issue in the community or it can join with educational or academic bodies in organizing and running high school, college or adult education programs. It can work alone or with other groups to explore an issue or to provide political know-how about testifying, petitioning, or any other technique for getting something done in the community. It can also present educational forums about issues on which the League has a position, provided that the discussions focus on issues of concern rather than the merits of specific pieces of legislation, no lobbying takes place and no call to action is issued. These events are good times to include membership, media and fundraising components.

Financial Considerations

As a general rule, voter services and citizen education events can be funded using tax-deductible monies. However, the safest and most flexible way to structure such events is for a League to host the event in its own name but to fund the event, in whole or in part, with a grant from an education fund. Those who attend then may (and should) be actively solicited for membership and for contributions. Membership brochures may be distributed—but remember that grant monies may not be used to pay for them; the grant from the education fund must be restricted to the costs of providing the educational content. One more advantage of the League hosting the event is that the League itself will then own the list of attendees, who can be solicited for membership and support.

The same principle applies to voters’ guides. If a printed voters’ guide is funded using tax-deductible monies, then any “ad” promoting League membership must be funded through the League’s general operating funds.

(Further education fund information that includes fiscal compliance, IRS Guidelines and how to use tax-deductible monies to fund voter services/citizen education events and activities is available on the League Web site.)
Below are the questions you will find at this LWVUS site. Check the site for the detailed answers!

**FAQ'S: LEAGUE CANDIDATE FORUMS AND DEBATES**

**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. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) is meant to be a quick resource on some of the main questions asked by Leagues.

This FAQ should not be construed as legal advice. State and local Leagues should consult their own tax and election law counsel to ensure that their debate plans are in accord with all applicable laws and regulations.

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

**BEST PRACTICES**

**What is the difference between a candidate debate and a candidate forum?**

**Where can I find information about "state rules" for local/state races?**

**CANDIDATES**

Note: Federal Level Races – *While this guidance for Leagues applies to the Presidential level as well, for “Federal Level” we will focus only on the U.S. House and U.S. Senate, because all outreach to Presidential candidates must go through the LWVUS Board.*

**What if a candidate is unopposed?**

**If one candidate is late for the debate can we start?**

**What if one candidate cancels because of an emergency?**

**If an empty chair debate is not permitted, how can the League defuse an angry audience and candidates?**

**Can a surrogate stand in for a candidate?**

**What if a candidate refuses to debate when there are only two candidates?**
ADMINISTRATION
Can funds for a candidate debate come from a 501c4 or must they all be from a 501c3?

Can we hold our candidate debate/forums at retirement home auditoriums?

Can a League work with their local government channel to air a debate?

What criteria should be used for candidate participation?

What information should be in a letter of invitation?

Do we really need pro bono legal advice? Insurance?

Are there guidelines for co-sponsors?

FORMATS
Note: Format advice applies to Federal, State and Local level races, so will not be broken out separately in this section.

How should candidate speaking order or party order be determined?

What about timing?

What methods can be used to obtain candidate questions? How do we screen or should we?

BLOGS, CELLPHONES AND FORUM FOOTAGE
What can we do to ensure that parts of our candidate debate are not captured on cell phones and broadcast in some way?

Are we obligated to give a tape or DVD of a candidate debate to anyone?

An individual has offered to put our candidate debate on YouTube? Should we accept?

What can be posted on our League Web site?

After the debate, a candidate used a clip from the debate in his/her campaign materials? What do we do?
Guidance for Leagues on Candidates Unwilling to Participate in Voter Education Opportunities

Every year Leagues hold hundreds of candidate debates and forums and produce hundreds of voters’ guides across the country to help voters learn about the candidates on their ballot. Unfortunately, there are some candidates that refuse to participate in these voter education activities and call into question the League’s reputation. Use below guidance and message points to help shape the public narrative and news coverage of these situations. For additional information about planning a debate, see our debates and forums FAQ and our voters’ guides best practices.

Are candidates refusing to participate in your debates or voters’ guide? These points can help:

Recent focus groups confirm that the public does NOT look favorably on candidates that try to duck debates. The public also trusts the League of Women Voter’s reputation for providing unbiased information to voters. If candidates refuse to participate in your activities, it’s important for the League to speak up. Try these points:

- When candidates refuse to participate in opportunities to help their future constituents learn more about them, this is a loss for voters.

- The League of Women Voters has a long history of conducting candidate forums, but this isn’t about the League: it’s about voters. We want to provide a platform for voters to learn about who will be on their ballot. That’s why we are particularly concerned about candidates who refuse to (show up and debate OR participate in voters’ guides).

- Candidates running for public office are applying for a job. Debates are like job interviews, and the voters are hiring. Who would hire an employee without interviewing them first?

- When a candidate decides to not (attend OR participate), it is a lost opportunity for all voters. Declining an opportunity to discuss the issues that matter most to voters is contrary to the public interest.”

- Research conducted on voter behavior and participation shows that not only does the public expect candidates to participate in voter education activities, but it also found that voters are more likely to vote when they know who the candidates are and where they stand on the issues. So when candidates choose not to participate, it’s the voters that are harmed.”
Also, take this opportunity to remind the community of all of the valuable voter service work you do for voters: candidate forums, voters’ guides and voter registration activities. Tell the story of the impact you have year in and year out.

Consider including some of your history – e.g. you’ve provided X valuable services (registration, debates or voters’ guides) for your community since X date and X voters have traditionally benefited from these voter education opportunities each year – and what you’re plans were for this year – e.g. the debate was going to be televised by X so all voters in the community would be able to tune in or X number of voters would receive the voters’ guide.

Also consider undertaking an action campaign, just like you would on any other issue, asking members and the public at-large to contact the candidates to ask them to reply to your voters’ guide or participate in your debate. People can contact the candidates via phone and email, but they can also do it publicly by tweeting at the candidates and/or posting to their Facebook page. If you’re going to use Facebook and Twitter, be sure you have lots of people lined up, including your coalition members, etc.
Guidelines for State And Local League Debates including “empty chair” debates

Candidate debates are regulated by federal and state election laws and regulations. In addition, important Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules apply to debates sponsored by organizations designated as 501(c)(3) by the IRS. League-sponsored debates are governed still further by the League’s own nonpartisan policy. Although legal challenges are infrequent, debates are high-stakes campaign activities, and candidates who believe they have been hurt politically by a debate may challenge debate sponsors under these laws.[1]

NOTE: The following overview should not be construed as legal advice. State and local Leagues should consult their own tax and election law counsel to ensure that their debate plans are in accord with all applicable laws and regulations. Suggested resources for additional information include: Federal Elections Commission (www.fec.gov); Internal Revenue Service (www.irs.gov); Federal Communications Commission (www.fcc.gov); and your state’s chief elections official (e.g. Secretary of State, State Board of Elections or Attorney General).

The League Framework

The League of Women Voters shall not support or oppose any political party or any candidate. All Leagues bear the responsibility of safeguarding this nonpartisan policy and the organization’s nonpartisan reputation.

League membership organizations are designated 501(c)(4) by the IRS, and League education fund corporations or trusts are designated 501(c)(3). League membership organizations that use funds in their education fund accounts must abide by education fund rules. Whether acting as a 501(c)(3) education fund or as a 501(c)(4) membership organization, each League will want to sponsor and conduct debates in such a way as to avoid creating the impression that it favors one candidate over another.

It is recommended that Leagues utilize a traceable form of mail delivery (e.g. USPS delivered, signed mail receipt or email returned mail receipt) to correspondence with the candidates regarding the “ground rules” for participating in the debate and the actual invitation to participate in the debate.

The Regulatory Framework

Key elements of the regulatory framework include the following:

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) regulates the conduct of corporate, labor and nonprofit organizations — including both 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations — in federal elections. FEC regulations define 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 confrontations, with opportunities to respond to each other.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates radio and television broadcasters and cablecasters. Under its regulations, a broadcaster that permits a candidate for any public office — federal, state or local — to use its facilities must provide all other legally qualified candidates for the same office with equal opportunities for use.
A broadcast debate must comply with the following FCC requirements.

- The decision to cover the debate must be based on a good faith judgment of its newsworthiness (and not on a desire to promote or disadvantage a particular candidate).

- The debate must not be edited and must be broadcast in its entirety, either live or reasonably soon after it takes place.

- The debate must include at least two candidates.

**Internal Revenue Service** (IRS) rules provide that 501(c)(3) organizations "may not participate or intervene, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office." This prohibition applies to campaigns for public office at all levels — federal, state and local. A violation of IRS rules could jeopardize the tax-exempt status of the 501(c)(3) organization responsible.

A 501(c)(3) organization may sponsor nonpartisan voter education projects, such as debates, provided certain rules are followed. The guiding principal for such debates is that there be fair and impartial treatment of all candidates, with nothing that promotes or advances one candidate over another.

"Empty Chair" Debates

It sometimes happens that only one candidate in a contested election accepts a debate invitation or that a candidate cancels a debate appearance after agreeing to participate, leaving the debate with only one participant — often called an "empty chair" debate. If only one candidate accepts the invitation, the debate should be canceled. While cancellation is also the most prudent course of action when a candidate fails to appear at the event or backs out shortly before the debate, Leagues may need to consider whether and how to proceed should they find themselves in an empty chair debate situation.

There are no specific guidelines from the FEC or the IRS pertaining to the ability of nonprofit organizations to sponsor an empty chair debate. (FCC regulations would preclude any broadcast coverage of such an event.) Inasmuch as an empty chair debate, by giving one candidate a forum to talk to voters all by him/herself, bestows a real benefit on that candidate, there is a risk to any League that hosting such a debate would run afoul of FEC and/or IRS rules as well as the League’s nonpartisan policy.

The degree of risk and the options available to Leagues vary depending on the office being sought by the candidates and the IRS designation of the sponsoring organization:

- For debates involving candidates for federal office, FEC rules are particularly significant. To meet the FEC definition of a debate and thereby avoid being categorized as an illegal contribution to a federal candidate, the event must include at least two candidates. This rule applies to debates sponsored by both 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) organizations. Any League that contemplates hosting an empty chair debate in connection with a federal election is strongly encouraged to seek formal guidance from the FEC. FEC rules do allow educational institutions (e.g., a university) to sponsor "candidate appearances" that also involve members of the public. The rules are not clear as to whether cosponsorship with an educational institution would give the League more latitude in dealing with an empty chair situation.

- For debates sponsored by 501(c)(3) organizations for candidates for state or local office, IRS rules are critical. (It is also critical to review any applicable state and local election laws.) Although empty chair debates are not expressly prohibited by the IRS, the agency might well consider such an event to be an improper electioneering activity. Leagues can reduce that risk by observing the following guidelines:

--- The League board’s decision to sponsor a debate should include adoption of relevant policies and rules well in advance of the intended debate. See *Face to Face* for ideas. These should include provisions about empty chair debates.
--- League sponsorship of the debate, the issuance of invitations, and candidate responses should be announced via press releases.

--- An empty chair debate should not be conducted if all but one candidate decline the League's offer to participate in a debate. It would be very risky for the League to sponsor the debate, knowing from the start that there will be only one participant.

--- An empty chair debate could be conducted only if one or more candidates pull out of a scheduled debate after agreeing to participate, and rescheduling is not feasible. (A League could also choose to cancel the debate in this situation.)

--- The closer to the scheduled debate that the candidate cancels his/her appearance, the stronger the arguments that going forward with the debate is not a partisan political activity.

--- If the candidate cancels well enough in advance of the debate to allow the sponsoring League to make other arrangements without charge or penalty, the League should make some effort to see if the debate can be rescheduled.

--- In announcing that a candidate has canceled his/her participation in a debate, the League should present the factual reasons given by the candidate, if any, without any editorial comment. If no reason is given by the candidate, the League should simply state that it was contacted by the candidate or his/her campaign and told that the candidate would not be able to appear at the debate; the League can also state that the candidate provided no reason for canceling his/her participation.

--- To maintain a clear record, the League should correspond in writing with candidates concerning invitations to appear at debates, attempts to accommodate each candidate's schedule, confirmation of scheduled debate appearances, confirmation of the cancellation of a debate appearance and attempts, if any, to reschedule a canceled appearance.

--- In conducting any empty chair debate, the League should maintain, to the extent practicable, the debate format. The League must prevent the debate from turning into a candidate appearance that has the look, feel and content of a campaign rally for the only candidate attending the debate. The moderator and other panelists, therefore, should ask nonpartisan questions, the length of the candidate's response should be limited, and if possible, the moderator and other panelists should act as devil's advocate, asking probing questions and follow-up questions.

• IRS rules are more liberal for debates sponsored by 501(c)(4) organizations, but the League nonpartisanship policy still applies. A League acting as a 501(c)(4) membership organization could sponsor a state or local candidate event involving only one candidate. In considering such an option, the League would want to ensure that
  --- the event would not violate any state or local election laws;
  --- no tax deductible funds would be used for the event; and
  --- the event would not damage the League's nonpartisan reputation by creating the impression that the League favored one candidate over another.
Face to Face:
The League of Women Voters’ Guide to Candidate Debates

Revised 2007
INTRODUCTION

*Face to Face: The League of Women Voters Guide to Candidate Debates* is designed to help many different kinds of groups -- including state and local Leagues of Women Voters -- sponsor and produce effective, fair and interesting candidate debates. It is a revision of *Face to Face: A Guide to League-Sponsored Debates*, published in 1987 (and now out of print), a publication that was specifically addressed to Leagues.

This handbook draws from the debates experience of the League of Women Voters Education Fund and state and local Leagues across the country. Since its inception in 1920, the League has held debates to inform and motivate voters. In the process, the League has become closely identified with candidate debates and has developed unrivaled debate expertise.

Since 1976, the League of Women Voters Education Fund has sponsored at least 24 presidential primary and general election, all nationally televised. In 1992, state and local Leagues sponsored more debates than any other organization in the United States.

In carrying out our mission of encouraging the informed and active participation of citizens in government Leagues of Women Voters will continue to be key sponsors of candidate debates. The League also wants to encourage and help other organizations to stage debates. This handbook is part of that effort.

It contains practical information, suggestions and advice that can be applied to all kinds of candidate debates -- from dog-catcher to President. It is addressed to groups large and small, statewide and local, private and public. Some of the information, such as the legal considerations, apply only to the United States, but ideas on formats, moderators and sets, for example, can help guide debate production in other countries.

Use this handbook as a reference. Not all of it will apply to your situation. If you need more information or hands-on expert guidance, call your local League of Women Voters (listed in the phone book) for assistance.

Good luck with your debate!

Becky Cain, Chair
League of Women Voters Education Fund
May, 1996
CHAPTER 1

DEBATE BASICS

"Debates offer the most extensive and serious view of candidates available to the electorate." Kathleen Hall Jamieson, 1987.

Most information about candidates, whether from the candidates themselves or filtered through journalists, comes to us in shorter and shorter snippets with each campaign. As the public turns from newspapers to television for its political information, it is faced with electoral decisions based on 30-second spot ads and sound bites. And for local politics and candidates there is even less television coverage.

It is no wonder that candidate debates have become an expected part of political campaigns and that major candidates avoid them only at great political risk. The number of political debates and the kinds of sponsorship have increased, and debate audiences are growing, especially for telecast or cablecast debates. One measure of the success and importance of debates is the extent to which they have become institutionalized as part of the American political process, as well as in established and emerging democracies around the world.

Debate Sponsors

Organizations with an interest in promoting citizen participation, strengthening democracy, putting candidates' views on the record and providing voter information find that candidate debates help them meet their institutional goals. Sponsors range from Leagues of Women Voters and other civic groups to newspapers and broadcasters. Groups with an interest in a particular issue area use debates to focus public attention on those issues and get the candidates to address them. Chambers of Commerce or Rotary Clubs, for example, sponsor debates for local offices and ask about candidates' tax policies and their support for small businesses. PTAs quiz candidates about educational goals and support for schools. Universities may hold debates focused on higher education and the concerns of young adults. Broadcasters and newspapers are increasingly involved in sponsoring debates, often in cooperation with a nonpartisan civic group.

It has become common for political party committees to hold debates for primary elections to help party members make decisions about candidates for nomination. Since 1988, general election presidential debates have been sponsored by a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, the Commission on Presidential Debates, founded by the two major national political party committees.

Generally, nonprofit, nonpartisan and journalistic organizations are permitted to hold debates for federal offices under Federal Election Commission (FEC) regulations and to broadcast them under Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulations. (see Chapter 2, Legal Considerations). Corporations and unions should not conduct debates for federal offices, but may provide a venue and/or financial support for a debate sponsored by a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization.

Benefits of Debates

The goal of most organizations that sponsor debates is to help voters make electoral decisions and to get candidates on the record so they can be held accountable for their stated positions on issues. To meet these goals, debates must attract and hold as large an audience as possible and must deal with real issues in the campaign.

Candidates see debates as an opportunity to get their message out to the voters. But candidates also use debates to embarrass attack opponents. Aware of the intensive news coverage engendered by debates, candidates strive to provide memorable sound bites and avoid fatal gaffes.

The voting public looks to debates for more than candidates' views on issue. They use debates to judge the candidates' characters, communication skills, sense of humor, ability to think on their feet and knowledge of public affairs issues. Post-debate surveys show that debates do influence voters' choices, especially undecided voters.
News Coverage

Many more voters learn about the debate from news coverage than actually see the debate itself. That is why candidates and their staff are so eager to meet with reporters immediately after the debate for "spin control," an effort to show a candidate's debate performance in the best possible light. Post-debate news coverage tends to emphasize the "horse race" aspect of the debate -- who "won" and who "lost" -- often using opinion polling and focus groups during and after the debate to substantiate the journalists' judgments. The news media also magnify the effect of any candidate's "gaffe" or mistake, and tend to favor reports on the candidates' debate strategy over the substance or contents of their responses.

Nevertheless, news coverage does get information about the candidates to many more voters, and debate sponsors should try to encourage and facilitate such coverage. Perhaps sponsoring organizations should engage in a little "spin control" of their own and persuade news organizations to expand their coverage to provide substantive information about the candidates' stands on the important issues in the election.
Planning for Debate Sponsorship

The amount of planning necessary to put on a successful debate varies greatly, depending on the size and complexity of the debate project. For even the simplest debate, a sponsoring organization needs to designate someone to set policy and someone to carry it out. Civic associations generally have policy-making boards that can take responsibility for making debate decisions. Either leaders of the organization or a paid or volunteer debate manager should implement the policy. For a large project, an organization may designate a Debate Committee to oversee the project, make detailed plans and contribute expertise and special skills to the effort.

Policy directives for the debate should be determined as early as possible. Policy decisions may include:

- setting the goals for the debate;
- adopting criteria for candidate participation (see Chapter 2, Legal Considerations);
- determining the scope of the debate project:
- selecting and overseeing debate staff (paid and volunteer);
- planning the preferred debate - format, site, schedule, broadcast plans
- developing a budget and plans for financing
- designating a negotiating team;
- determining the overall negotiating strategy and any nonnegotiable terms;
- planning the promotion strategy;
- setting up a process for quick decision making in the event of emergencies.

A Sample Debate Timetable

This is a sample schedule, assuming a debate for a major office and plans for broadcasting the debate. Allotted planning time is one year, including fundraising. There is a spring primary and a November general election, but the debate is for the general election only.

12 months ahead:
- Development of Proposal
- Organization's board determines:
  - Budget
  - Fundraising plans
  - Number and approximate timing of debates
  - Qualifications and terms of employment for debate manager and other staff
  - Assignment of board responsibilities
  - Selection of Debate Committee

11 months ahead:
- Debate Manager hired

10 months ahead:
- Board approves and adopts candidate criteria
- Preliminary decisions: date, format, site, audience
• Other staff and consultants hired
• Debate Committee meets and sets up schedule of meetings
• Fundraising begins

8 months ahead:
• Promotion strategy developed
• First informal contact with potential candidates
• Negotiating team selected
• Discussions with potential broadcasters begin

6 months ahead
• Letters sent to candidates running in primaries
• Materials (posters, flyers, programs, etc.) designed
• Site selection and review begins

5 months ahead
• Letters sent to winners of primaries and others who are eligible to participate
• Negotiations with candidates begin
• Broadcaster selected
• Site selected
• Selection of moderator and panel begins

3 months ahead
• Deadlines for:
  o site confirmation,
  o broadcast commitment,
  o candidate commitment,
  o format selection
• Materials printed
• Placement of advertisements, listings and PSAs begins

2 months ahead
• Volunteers recruited
• Staff for debate site selected
• Arrangements made for equipment at site
• Criteria established for selection of audience and distribution of tickets
• Moderator/panel selected

1 month ahead
• Invitations/tickets sent out
• Media advisory sent on debate date and credentials procedure
• Volunteers trained and assigned
• Promotion campaign intensifies
• Site arrangements reconfirmed
• Candidates notified about ground rules, schedule and arrangements at site

1 week ahead
• Site reviewed with broadcaster
• All details reconfirmed

2 weeks after
• Evaluation meeting
• Thank you letters and mementos sent to all participants and volunteers
2 months after
  • Final Reports completed

The Debate Staff

The size and composition of the debate staff will vary considerably, depending on the debate plans. For a large, complex debate project, staff members might include:

Debate Manager No matter how large or small the debate project, it is important for someone to be in charge. The manager may be paid or volunteer. Either way, the duties of the debate manager should be written out in a job description and any stipend or payments for expenses specified. The debate manager should be on board early enough to be part of the planning process.

Treasurer Managing the finances of the debate is critical. The sponsoring organization's treasurer may carry out this task.

Secretarial/Clerical Support If your organization has administrative staff, they can perform these functions, or you can use volunteers and/or temporary staff.

Promotion Coordinator Promotion is an important component of a debate. A promotion coordinator will plan and carry out the promotion strategy and relieve the debate manager of the responsibility for contacting the news media.

Consultants You may need the services of consultants for promotion, graphic design, broadcasting or legal issues. Even if these services are donated, a written contract will ensure that there are no misunderstandings about responsibilities, lines of authority and deadlines.

Volunteers At every stage of planning and staging a debate, volunteers make the job easier. Membership organizations can involve their members in the process. Other sources for volunteers include civic groups, students, senior centers and volunteer clearinghouses. Tasks for volunteers include:

Before the debate:
  • produce materials
  • answer inquiries
  • make fundraising calls
  • help with news releases and conferences
  • design and distribute flyers and posters
  • stuff and address invitations
  • design, produce and distribute tickets and programs

During the debate:
  • take tickets and maintain security usher
  • check news reporters' credentials and see that their needs are met
  • escort candidates and VIPs

After the debate:
  • monitor and clip news coverage
  • help evaluate the debate

Volunteers should receive training, guidance and plenty of gratitude. If you are using many volunteers, a volunteer coordinator should be added to the debate staff.
Financing the Debate

The Debate Budget: Once you have decided on the basic plans for your debate, develop a realistic budget. Consider the budget as a planning document, subject to revision as your costs and income become clearer. Consider the following line items:

-- Debate Manager Stipend - Estimate the hours required to do the job, and investigate pay scales for comparable work in your community.

-- Volunteer Expenses - Budget for dependent care, mileage, parking, food and other out-of-pocket expenses. Volunteers may, if they wish, donate their expense money back to the organization, but it should be their choice. Also consider budgeting for a reception or some other way of expressing appreciation to the volunteers.

-- Secretarial Assistance - For correspondence, typing, answering the phone, duplicating, etc. Even if your organization has office staff, the debate budget should include funds to reimburse the organization for the staff's time and pay for any outside help.

-- Overhead - If your organization's office or equipment is used for the debate project, include overhead as a percentage of your budget (from 10 to 25 percent, depending on extent of use) or include the actual costs for office rent and equipment use.

-- Consultants or Professional Fees - Budget sufficient funds to call on experts as needed for advice on management, broadcast technology, promotion strategy and techniques, or debate formats. Consultation may be available as an in-kind contribution.

-- Legal Fees and Costs - Be prepared for the worst. See Chapter 2, Legal Considerations.

-- Promotion - Include everything from on-air promotion spots to news releases. Allow for in-kind promotion assistance from your broadcaster.

-- Advertising - Check prices of ads in your local and regional newspapers and in the TV Guide (broadcasters often get special rates for such paid ads), find out production costs for radio and television public service announcements (PSAs) -- and budget as much as you can.

-- Evaluation - Include any planned surveys, focus groups or contracts with television ratings services, printing and compilation of evaluation questionnaires and printing and distribution of final reports.

-- Production Costs - Include costs of debate set, any site-related costs, microphones, make-up, signs, etc.

-- Contingency - This catch-all item should be sufficient to cover unexpected expenses such as a satellite hook-up for statewide broadcast coverage, arrangements for the media, such as television monitors or phone hook-ups, security at the debate site, etc. Because debate expenses are so unpredictable, allow for more contingency funds than usual.

Fundraising

If your organization does not have sufficient resources to put on a debate and if in-kind contribution from a broadcaster or from organization members will not meet all of your needs, you will have to solicit funds from others. Your debate is an important educational and citizen participation activity and deserves the support of local foundations, businesses, unions and individual donors. If your organization is designated by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) organization, funds contributed to it may be deducted from the donor's income for income-tax purposes.
Develop a clear, concise debate proposal, including:

- the need for greater citizen participation and voter education;
- your credentials as a nonpartisan, impartial organization that serves the public interest;
- other experience you have had in voter education or debate sponsorship;
- plans for your debate, including commitments from candidates and/or broadcasters;
- information about your organization, your officers and the debate staff;
- plans for evaluation and final reports;
- how contributions will be acknowledged and any other perks for funders;
- acknowledgement in the program and other written materials;
- mention in debate promotion and advertising;
- notice in the news release announcing the debate;
- mention in credits before and/or after the broadcast;
- preferred seating at the debate;
- attendance at a special reception;
- gift of a tape or transcript of the debate;
- a debates budget, with explanations of line items;
- information about any contributions (including in-kind) that already have been received or committed.

If despite all of your efforts, you do not meet your fundraising goals, revise your budget and your plans accordingly. Check on such alternatives as seeking in-kind contributions from broadcasters, using an in-studio debate site or securing free air time for public service announcements to promote your debate. But don't be tempted to sacrifice quality or professionalism, and don't put an unfair burden on your organization.

It is important to keep accurate accounts of how debate funds are used. Good financial records will help you report to funders, make a pitch to future funders, evaluate the project and develop budgets for future debates and other events.
CHAPTER 2

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Regulatory Framework

Candidate debates, as an important part of the American political process, are regulated by federal and state election laws and regulations; broadcast debates are subject to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules. Although challenges to debate sponsors under these rules are infrequent, sponsors should understand the relevant regulations and take them into consideration when planning and staging a debate. Debates are high-stakes campaign activities for candidates, and candidates who have been hurt politically by a debate or have not been invited to participate may challenge sponsors under these laws.

Sponsors who plan debates in accord with the applicable laws and regulations will be secure in the knowledge that they are meeting their legal responsibilities and will have a far better chance of prevailing if they do face a legal challenge.

Federal Election Commission (FEC) Regulations

The Federal Election Commission was established to enforce limits on contributions to, or expenditures made on behalf of, candidates for federal office by individuals or groups. The FEC rules apply only to candidates for federal office.

Under most circumstances, providing a platform for a candidate to address the public or providing information about a candidate is considered to be a campaign contribution and thus subject to the contributions or expenditures limit. However, tax-exempt, nonpartisan organizations, broadcasters, bona fide newspapers, magazines and other periodicals may stage nonpartisan debates (as defined by the FEC) without triggering campaign finance limitations. Organizations may use their own funds or accept donations from corporations or labor organizations for such debates. Federal candidate events that do not meet the FEC definition of "debate," such as single candidate appearances ("empty chair debates") or consecutive candidate interviews ("forums"), may be considered as contributions subject to campaign finance limitations.

Organizations designated as tax-exempt by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) must be especially careful to protect their nonpartisan status by making sure that their debates do not, in any way, promote or advance one candidate over others.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Regulations

The Federal Communications Commission regulates radio and television broadcasters and cable casters. Under its regulations, any broadcaster or cable caster that gives a candidate for any public office -- federal, state or local -- the use of its facilities must provide all other legally qualified candidates for the same office with equal opportunities for use. (Regularly scheduled, bona fide newscasts, news interviews and news documentaries are exempt from this requirement, as is broadcast coverage of news events such as debates.)

The FEC regulations apply to the debate broadcaster, not the sponsoring organization. However, debate sponsors should be aware of the restraints placed on broadcasters, such as:

- a broadcaster's decision to cover a debate should be based on a good faith, reasonable judgment of its newsworthiness;
- debates must not be edited and must be broadcast in their entirety;
- debates should be broadcast live or reasonably soon after they take place;
- at least two candidates must appear in any debate.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Tax-Exempt Organizations

The Internal Revenue Service considers forums and debates on political and social issues as appropriate educational activities for organizations that are exempt from taxation. Organizations that are designated as eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions, (501(c)(3) organizations
such as charities, educational and religious institutions and civic groups that do not engage in legislative lobbying may not, directly or indirectly, "participate in or intervene in ,, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." Any such action may jeopardize the organization's eligibility to receive tax deductible funds. Such organizations should make sure that their debates treat all candidates fairly and impartially, and do not promote or advance one candidate over another.

State Laws  Although the FEC regulations apply only to candidates for federal office, many states have campaign finance laws and laws that limit the activities of tax-exempt organizations. Sponsors of debates for candidates for state and local office should be aware of any relevant state laws.

Applying Regulations

Primary Elections  According to decisions by the FEC and the IRS and supported by the courts, primary election debate sponsors can treat each party's primary as a separate election. That means that organizations can limit participation in a primary election to those candidates seeking the nomination of one party. Minor party or independent candidates need not be included. Also, an organization may hold a debate for the candidates in one party's primary election without any obligation to hold debates for other parties' primaries.

Candidate Selection  It is especially important to consider the regulatory constraints on candidate debates when deciding which candidates should be invited to participate. The most prudent route is to invite all the candidates running for a particular office. There are many situations, however, when this is not wise or feasible. For example, one or more marginal candidates may be part of a large field of candidates running for the same office. The debate sponsor may decide that the public interest would be served best by limiting participation to "significant" candidates. A debate among a large number of candidates, especially if there are time constraints, might be unmanageable and not provide voters with useful information.

Sponsors must make candidate selection decisions in a clear, fair and reasonable way. To accomplish this, they should establish official selection criteria, based on their goals for the debate, and use them to determine which candidates are eligible to participate. Sponsors must realize that, even if they use objectively applied selection criteria, they may be challenged by uninvited candidates and may face objections ranging from protest rallies to lawsuits or complaints to federal or state agencies.

But if the sponsor has official debate goals and selection criteria, it will be possible to demonstrate that the sponsor's decisions were reasonable, not arbitrary, and not made to promote or disadvantage any candidate. Even if a debate sponsor intends to invite all candidates running for an office, or if only two candidate are running, it is helpful to have criteria in place to deal with unexpected circumstances such as last-minute write-in candidates.

Ideally, selection criteria should be developed for each debate sponsored, based on the nature of the election (primary, general, special, partisan or nonpartisan) the likelihood of minor party, independent or write-in candidates and whether the debate will be broadcast. Criteria used for one debate should not be automatically applied to others but may serve as a guide. Criteria should be reviewed and readopted for each debate.

How to Set Criteria for Candidate Selection  Use the following checklist to set and apply criteria for determining candidates' eligibility to participate in a debate:

1. Define the organization's goal for sponsoring the debate -- i.e., educating voters about candidates' views on issues and stimulating voter interest and participation in the election.

2. Develop criteria that:
   - implements the debate goal
   - are nonpartisan, fair, impartial and clear
   - can be applied objectively

3. Adopt the criteria before any candidates have been invited. For organizations with a board and/or officers, the criteria should be adopted as an official action.
4. State clearly that the candidates must meet all the criteria to be eligible.

5. Send written invitations to all candidates who are clearly eligible. Include copies of the debate goals and selection criteria.

6. If other candidates seek an invitation, the burden of proof is on them to establish eligibility. You may request information to support a candidate's claim to eligibility.

7. Include information about the debate goals and selection criteria with publicity announcing the debate to the public and the news media. Send copies to the invited candidates and to others on request.

8. Once criteria have been adopted, stick to them and apply them consistently. The criteria are not negotiable; do not yield to pressure to change or waive them to accommodate particular candidates.

BOX

EXAMPLES OF CRITERIA THAT HAVE BEEN USED TO SELECT CANDIDATES TO PARTICIPATE IN A DEBATE

--Constitutional Eligibility: The candidate, if elected, must be legally qualified to hold the office under federal and state law.

--Eligibility to be on the Ballot

--Evidence of a Campaign: (especially applicable in federal or statewide elections or in states where ballot access is unduly difficult or jurisdictions with a tradition of write-in candidates) The candidate has made a public announcement of an intention to run; the candidate has a campaign headquarters and staff, has issued position papers and has made campaign appearances.

--"Significant" Candidacy: (used to limit debate participation to candidates who have a reasonable chance of being elected)

1. Results of major, reliable, nonpartisan public opinion polls -- use a reasonable percentage, i.e., 10 - 15 percent -- to show evidence of support, keeping in mind the probable number of candidates. Possible polling sources include professional pollsters, independent newspapers and broadcasters and universities. Set a cut-off date, so there will be sufficient time to make final debate plans.

2. Eligibility for public matching funds (if applicable).

3. Coverage by the media as a recognized candidate.

Include a statement that the organization will use its "good faith judgment" in applying factors to determine "significance."

Clearly state the factors that will be used to measure significance.

This is the most difficult criterion to establish and depends on information that is not always available, especially in local elections. Several of the above factors can be used to measure significance, depending on the availability of information. Select those factors that are appropriate for the office or election and make sure you have sufficient information to apply them objectively.

END OF BOX
Copyright Issues

Who "Owns" a Debate and Why Does It Matter? Once a debate has been recorded -- whether by video or audio tape or as a written transcript, -- copyright laws govern its sale. Unless there is a written agreement to the contrary, everyone who participated in creating a debate, including the sponsor, the broadcaster, candidates, moderator, panelists, even producers and camerapersons, has a potential claim to ownership of at least part of the final product.

An organization that wants to have control of the distribution and use of debate tapes and/or transcripts -- for example, to prevent the use of debate excerpts in partisan political ads -- should assert its claim of copyright ownership in written agreements with broadcasters and candidates.

A copyright notice should appear on all copies of tapes and transcripts (consisting of the word "copyright" or the letter "c" in a circle, the name of the copyright owner and the year of publication.) In order to challenge an infringement of a copyright, an organization should seek the assistance of a legal expert who specializes in this complex area of the law.

Legal Protection

Plans and budgets for any major debate should include provisions for legal advice in case it is needed. Nonprofit organizations can try to secure free or reduced rate assistance, perhaps from attorneys who are members or relatives of members or from law school faculties or major law firms that provide pro bono help. Most legal challenges, usually from candidates who are not asked to participate in the debate, are designed to stop the debate from happening. An organization that has easy access to legal assistance can cope with the disruption of an unexpected, last minute legal challenge.

Organizations also may need legal assistance to:

- keep current with federal, state and local requirements;
- review criteria for consistency with current applicable laws;
- draft or review agreements with candidates, broadcasters or cosponsors and, if necessary, advise on the enforcement of agreements;
- draft or review contracts with staff, consultants or mangers of debate sites;
- protect the organization's copyright interests in the debate record.

A LEGAL GLOSSARY FOR DEBATES

Federal Election Commission (FEC) - an agency established by the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 to administer the act and enforce limits on contributions that can be made to, or expenditures that can be made on behalf of, candidates for federal office by individuals and groups.

Candidate for Federal Office (for purposes of FEC regulations) - persons running for President, Vice-President, senator, representative, delegate or resident commissioner to the U.S. Congress. A candidate for federal office is subject to the FEC regulations when she or he has received contributions or made expenditures exceeding an aggregate of $5,000; others have received or spent more than an aggregate of $5,000 on her or his behalf; or, after written notification from the FEC, she or he has failed to disavow such contributions or spending by others.

Debate (as defined by the FEC for exemption from campaign finance regulations) - an event staged by a nonpartisan organization that:
includes two or more candidates;

is staged in a way that it is fair to all participating candidates, i.e., the format does not promote or give an advantage to one candidate over the other(s);

the candidates appear concurrently, in face to face confrontations, with opportunities to respond to each other.

Federal Communications Commission (FCC) - an agency established by the Communications Act of 1934 to regulate broadcasters; Section 315(a) of the act provides that whenever a broadcaster or cable caster permits any legally qualified candidate for any public office to "use" a broadcast station or cable facilities, it must also allow equal opportunities for use to all other legally qualified candidates for that office.

Legally Qualified Candidate - (as defined by the FCC) an individual who:

- has publicly announced an intention to run for nomination or office;
- is eligible under the applicable laws to hold the office being sought;
- either has qualified to be on the ballot; or has publicly committed to be a write-in candidate and can show that the candidacy is bona fide (by making campaign speeches, distributing literature, and issuing press releases maintaining a campaign committee, or establishing campaign headquarters.)

Use (for purposes of FCC regulations) - any broadcast or cablecast of a legally qualified candidate's voice or picture in such a way that he or she can be identified by viewers, even if the appearance is not for the purpose of discussing the candidacy.

Nonpartisan Organization (as defined by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) - a nonprofit organization that is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) or Section 501(c)(4) and that does not endorse, support or oppose political candidates and parties.
CHAPTER 3
DEBATE CONTENT

Debates play a unique role in election campaigns. In candidate-controlled campaign appearances and ads, candidates shape the agenda to their own ends, often by aiming attacks at their opponents on issues of little concern to the voters, and they avoid taking stands on important issues. The news media reports on the "horse race" -- who's ahead and why -- and on campaign strategy. Debates, on the other hand, impel candidates to speak to the issues and challenge one another on the record. As sponsor, you are responsible for setting the tone of the debate and assuring that it meets your organization's goals and the public interest.

The heart of a debate is the interaction between the candidates. A debate program includes other elements -- introductions, credits, explanations of rules and procedures, directions to the audience and candidates' opening and closing statements. The first rule is to use only those elements that are absolutely necessary. The second is to keep them short. You do not want to take too much of the limited time and audience attention away from the substance of the debate.

Get to the meat of the debate as soon as possible. Try to disperse introductions and explanations throughout the debate. For example, introduce each participant, panelist or candidate just before he or she is about to speak. Explain (briefly -- the audience will catch on) the rules of each segment as you come to it. You can give the on-site audience instructions before the debate begins. Try to get the candidates to forgo opening statements. Promote your organization and credit your contributors at the end of the debate or do it visually, using logos, a banner, signs or written programs. If your debate is broadcast, you can use a taped or live lead-in, with music, a picture of the debate site, symbols of the debaters' political parties, contributor acknowledgements, etc. The goal is to start in with a bang. You want your audience to be enthusiastic -- to stay tuned in.

Issues and Questions

Choosing Debate Issues Some sponsors who represent special interests (such as senior citizens, a parent organization or a Chamber of Commerce) want to ensure that issues of interest to their members will be discussed. Other organizations strive to include a wide range of issues. Whatever your goal, the issues you choose should be relevant to the campaign and to the office being sought by the candidates. Don't ask candidates for mayor to discuss foreign policy or candidates for Congress to comment on local school boundaries.
Keep the voters in mind as you choose the issues to be covered in your debate. Take your clues from polls that explore the electorate's concerns and from questions asked of candidates at campaign appearances and on talk shows. Keep track of the issues analyzed by the news media during the campaign. Ask the public to contribute ideas for debate topics using contests, advertisements, a free 1-800 telephone hotline or the Internet.

**Effective Questions** If you are using a question-and-answer format, keep the questions short and clear. Candidates faced with complex or multi-part questions can get away with answering only part of the question. A series of short questions on different aspects of the same topic works better than a long, convoluted question.

However, do not make assumptions about your audience's knowledge or understanding of the issue under discussion. Do not use jargon or acronyms. In a few words, put the question in the context of the campaign and the candidate's previously stated positions. If the issue is particularly complex or controversial, ask the candidate to help explain or define the issue (i.e., "What effect would a rise in interest rates have on the city's budget, and what would you do about it?")

Use questions that require the candidates to take a stand. General questions ("In your opinion, what are the three most important issues coming before Congress next session?") are a good way to introduce new topics, but you should follow up with specifics. Scenario questions ("What would you do if...?") if well designed, may reveal a candidate's creativity and ability to make quick policy decisions, but the candidate can easily avoid the point of the question by denying the premise ("That would never happen in my administration.") Questions that require a quick "yes" or "no" answer can liven up a debate and put candidates on the record, but are more informative when candidates are required to justify or explain their answers.

Remember that a debate is not a quiz show. The candidate who can come up with the most arcane bits of information will not necessarily make the best public official. Use questions that reveal the candidates' thinking about an issue, not their ability to recall facts quickly.

**Opening and Closing Statements**

Candidates like opening and closing statements; they provide an opportunity to make prepared campaign speeches to the captive debate audience. Opening statements now are used rarely, and should be avoided. They tend to be shortened version of the candidates' standard stump speeches. In the past, a few candidates have used them to launch attacks on their opponents, hoping to affect the opponent's performance in the rest of the debate. Routine statements of a candidate's qualifications for office can be useful for voters, but they tend to get the debate off to a slow start.

Short closing statements do serve a purpose, allowing candidates to sum up their position, tie up loose ends and answer any charges that came up during the debate.

Try to get candidates to give spontaneous closing statements, related to what has been said during the debate. Such statements are far more interesting and revealing than prepared speeches. Besides, candidates have many other opportunities to give their standard campaign pitches.
CHAPTER 4

FASHIONING A FORMAT

Changing Trends in Formats

Although the televised presidential debate is now considered an institutionalized part of presidential campaigns, it is a fairly recent phenomenon. The first televised debates were the historic Kennedy - Nixon debates in 1960. The next presidential election debates were in 1976, and they have been held in every election since. As the most watched and best remembered debates, the format used in presidential general election debates became a model for all other candidate debates. Presidential primary debate sponsors experimented with innovative formats from time to time, but up until 1992, the general election debates consistently used the traditional format of questions from a panel of journalists and timed candidate responses. Over the years, opportunities for follow-up questions and rebuttals were added, but the basic formula remained the same.

The 1992 presidential general election debates proved to be landmarks in the evolution of debate formats. The sponsor, the Commission on Presidential Debates, proposed four debates, all using the traditional format. The Democratic challenger, Bill Clinton, readily agreed, but the incumbent Republican, George Bush, held out for fewer debates and more favorable scheduling. As a result of the impasse, the candidates negotiated an agreement calling for three debates (plus a vice-presidential debate), all in one week, and each with a different format. Ross Perot participated in all three debates. The first debate used the traditional format. The second debate featured the candidates seated on stools and fitted with portable microphones taking questions from an audience of 209 uncommitted voters sitting in the hall. The third debate used a press panel for the first half and a strong moderator who encouraged interchange for the second half.

The debates were a huge success, attracting a viewing audience that increased for each debate, with the audience for the last debate estimated at 90 million. The new formats were clearly effective at keeping audiences interested and tuned in. Each one played up the strengths of a different candidate. Political analysts felt Perot and Clinton did best in the first debate, Clinton dominated the second, town-hall style debate and Bush recovered somewhat in the last debate.

In Televised Presidential Debates (1992), Helweg, Pfau and Brydon distinguish between "televised debates" and "television debates." The distinction is important because it traces an evolution in presidential debate formats. From 1976 to 1983, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) required that debates be set up by an organization independent of the broadcaster and the political parties, and be broadcast live, in its entirety, as a news event. The resulting televised debate was held before a large audience with the candidates addressing their responses to the on-site audience. The event was covered and aired by one or more television stations or networks. and followed a rigid, formal format.

In 1983, the FCC ruled that radio and television stations could stage debates involving candidate of their choice without violating equal time provisions and that debates could be held in broadcast studios. The ruling led to a jump in the number and variety of debate sponsors. It also made the television debate possible. A television debate is much less formal and more free-flowing. It resembles a political "talk show" created for television. In 1984, television producers felt free to experiment with presidential primary election debate formats. Ted Koppel and Phil Donahue moderated a three hour conversational primary debate, and CBS staged a debate in-the-round at the Columbia University moderated by Dan Rather. In 1988, William, F. Buckley held separate "Firing Line" debates for the Democratic and Republican presidential primary races.

Future debates at every level will undoubtedly feature more innovation and less formality. Candidates and voters now are more willing to accept new ways of conducting debates and evolving technology will make more creative and ingenious formats possible.

Designing A Format

The format is what makes a debate different from an argument, a discussion or a joint news conference. It imposes rules and limits that guarantee that the debate is fair and impartial and offers each candidate an equal opportunity be
heard and to respond to the other candidates.

A debate format can be as simple as two candidates sitting at a table and discussing the issues in front of television cameras (as candidates for Prime Minister of Canada traditionally do) or it can feature strict time limits for questions, answers, rebuttals and counter rebuttals. Format often becomes a matter of contention between sponsors, candidates and broadcasters. Sponsors want formats that provide information while keeping an audience's attention; candidates want formats that showcase their strengths and present no surprises or risks; and broadcasters are looking for a good show --- lively, contentious and unpredictable. The solution often is a debate broken into several segments with different formats (or a series of debates each with a different format). Debate analysts Kathleen Hall Jamieson and David S. Birdsell recommend a mixed format because the resulting debate allows voters to see how candidates fare (1) in direct confrontation, (2) in a formal question-and-answer or news conference format and (3) (in closing statements) in delivering a set political speech.

The nature of the election campaign influences the choice of a format. Formats suitable for a general election debate with two or three contenders will not necessarily work for a primary debate that includes many candidates who do not differ sharply on issues. If a campaign is characterized by negative ads and name-calling, a structured format will put pressure on candidates to talk about issues rather than each other. On the other hand, an informal, interactive format will bring out the reasoning behind the candidates' set responses and speeches.

Types of Formats

Below is a look at some tried and true formats and how they work:

1. Traditional or Formal
This is the kind of debate encountered in high school and college debating competitions. It begins with a "proposition," a statement of opinion on an issue. Each candidate addresses the proposition in an opening statement; each candidate than has an opportunity to rebut or respond to the statement.

Proposition is read- (2 minutes)
Opening statement - Candidate A (4 minutes)
Opening statement - Candidate B (4 minutes)
Rebuttal - Candidate A (1 minute)
Rebuttal - Candidate B (1 minute)
(Counter Rebuttals are an option)
Closing Statement - Candidate A (2 minutes)
Closing Statement - Candidate B (2 minutes)

This format limits the number of topics that can be addressed and forces candidates into a pro or con stance, leaving little room for agreements or gradations of opinion. While not generally used for candidate debates, this format can be effective for one segment of a longer debate, focusing the discussion on a topic on which the candidate hold sharply differing views. The rebuttal has become part of many other debate formats.

Variations include:

- candidates each submit several propositions in advance; the sponsor chooses one from each candidate.
- after the opening statements and rebuttals, the candidates question each other (a format developed at the University of Oregon).

2. Question and Answer with Timed Responses

This "classic" debate formula is perhaps the most familiar. A moderator or panelist addresses a question to a candidate and the candidate has a set time to respond. Sometimes each candidate is expected to answer each question:

Question # 1 to Candidate A (30 seconds)
Candidate A responds (2 minutes)
Question # 1 to Candidate B, rephrased (30 seconds)
Candidate B responds (2 minutes)
Candidate C responds (2 minutes)
Sometimes each candidate gets a different question:

Question # 1 to Candidate A (30 seconds)
Candidate A responds (2 minutes)
Question # 2 to Candidate B (30 seconds)
Candidate B responds (2 minutes)
Question # 3 to Candidate C (30 seconds)
Candidate C responds (2 minutes)

Candidates like this format because it is relatively predictable and resembles a news conference. Incumbents, particularly, are practiced at anticipating questions and come prepared with answers. The exact timing makes it easy to fit the debate into a broadcast time-slot. However, it offers little or no opportunity for candidates to respond to each other. It tends to be fragmented, jumping from one issue to another with little continuity and even less depth. Its very predictability and repetition make it tedious to watch.

Variations  Using one or more of these variations will improve the classic debate format:

- rebuttals - give candidates the opportunity to give a timed response to an opponent's answer.
- follow-up questions - allow the moderator or panelist to ask related follow-up questions to probe for more in-depth answers or non-evasive responses.
- candidate follow-up questions - provide an opportunity for candidates to ask opponents questions that are directly related to the opponent's response.
- "jump ball" questions - the "jump ball" technique is especially useful in multi-candidate debates. The moderator or panelist poses a question and each candidate has the opportunity to respond. Candidates may (1) use all the allotted time for a detailed answer, (2) briefly indicate agreement or disagreement with another candidate or (3) choose not to answer. The moderator may encourage reluctant candidates to participate and try to keep any candidates from dominating the debate.

3. Loose Question and Answer/Cross Talk Format  This format resembles a good television talk show, with the moderator taking the role of host. The moderator poses questions or introduces issues and then guides the candidates in a discussion. During the discussion, the candidates may question each other, ask follow-up questions and offer rebuttals. It is the moderator's responsibility to ensure that all the candidates have an equal opportunity to speak to each issue and that the discussion does not stray too far away from the topic. The moderator must try to prevent the debate from degenerating into a series of charges and countercharges.

This format is especially effective on television. It requires a strong moderator to keep the discussion on track and will work only if the candidates have agreed in advance to accept the moderator's authority.

Variations:
- topics can be introduced using taped descriptions with or without brief impartial analysis. In this way, the basics of the topic are set out and the candidates can use their time to discuss their positions.
- candidates have a specified amount of time to speak during the entire debate or debate segment. Timekeepers keep track of how much cumulative time each candidate has used, and inform the candidates, moderator and audience as each candidate is about to run out of time.

4. Cross Questioning  Candidates ask each other questions and the moderator acts as referee, enforcing the rules and keeping the debate on track. This format works best as one segment of a mixed-format debate. Since the candidates control the agenda, they can avoid bringing up issues of substance and allow the debate to focus on personalities or ask each other "sweetheart" questions.

On the other hand, this format allows the audience to evaluate candidates by their questions as well as their answers. Voters can gain insight into such character traits as fairness, aggressiveness, originality and the ability to plan and act strategically.
Variations:

- the ground rules may restrict the questions to specified issue areas.
- candidates may submit the questions in advance to be asked by the moderator.
- the questions and answers may be subject to time limits.

Sample Timing for Two Candidates

Moderator introduces cross-questioning segment (30 seconds)
Candidate A poses question to Candidate B  (30 seconds)
Candidate B responds (2 minutes)
Candidate B poses question to Candidate A  (30 seconds)
Candidate A responds (2 minutes)

5. Questions from the Audience  In this "town meeting" format, members of the audience ask the candidates questions in turn. The format can be lively and spontaneous, raise issues of real interest to the voters and put the spotlight on citizen participation.

This format requires either a large, self-selected audience or an audience carefully chosen to represent diverse segments of the electorate, especially undecided voters. Candidates should not be able to pack the audience with their supporters.

Usually, there needs to be some control over the questions. Audience questions may be unclear, hostile and bullying, or attempt to draw attention to the questioner. Although asking audience members to submit questions in advance may sacrifice some spontaneity, it allows the sponsor to screen for repetition, clarity and appropriateness and to make sure each candidate gets approximately the same number of questions. Audience members may ask the chosen questions themselves or they may be read by the moderator.

Variations:

- Viewers or listeners in the broadcast audience may phone in questions. The public may be asked to submit questions in advance of the debate. Films or tapes of questions posed by persons-in-the-street, school children, senior citizens or other special groups can be used.
- Questions may be submitted by E-mail or over the Internet.

A Word about Timing  Decisions about how much time to allot for response, rebuttals or cross talk can be difficult. One or two minutes may seem like an eternity if a candidate is trying to stretch out a simple answer to a simple question; it may seem grossly inadequate to explain the implications of a complex issue or policy position. Consider varying response times to suit the questions. One segment of a debate could have questions calling for quick answers (yes, I support; no, I oppose), while another segment allows sufficient time for analysis and explanation. Candidates should not be required to use all the time allotted to them.

Ground rules for timing should be agreed upon before the debate. Generally, a candidate will be allowed to finish a sentence, once started. if a candidate does not use all the time allotted for a response, it usually cannot be applied to any other purpose or question (unless the format specifically allows use of accumulated time).

Use an unobtrusive method, such as cards or lights, to alert candidates that most or all of their time has been used. Loud bells or buzzers interrupt the candidates' and the audience's concentration and create a game-show atmosphere.

CHAPTER 5

THE QUESTIONERS - MODERATORS AND PANELISTS

Every debate needs a moderator. Although the role varies greatly with the format, at a minimum the moderator, as representative of the sponsor, enforces the rules and introduces the proceedings and the participants.

A panel of questioners, however, is an option. It once was thought that a panel of experienced news reporters could
best ferret out information from reluctant candidates. Now, questions come from many sources -- the audience, the candidates themselves, the sponsor or the public. Still, candidates often prefer to face a panel of familiar faces and think of the panel as a buffer between themselves, the other candidates and the audience. However, news reporters often have their own agendas -- to generate news headlines and draw attention to their own cleverness -- that may conflict with the interests of the sponsor and the voters. As Jack Germond and Jules Witcover put it in their analysis of the 1992 presidential campaign, "...a single-moderator format produced far more coherent expositions of the differences among candidates than an examining board of posturing reporters."

Selection of Panelists If candidates insist on a panel for all or part of a debate, look for a variety in questioning styles and backgrounds. Choose a diverse panel, representing different media, different viewpoints and different groups in the electorate. Broadcasters should consider the need for diversity in choosing panelists and look beyond their own on-air talent. A panel should consist of at least three people and at most, five. A good guide to follow is that as the number of candidates in the debate increases, the number of panelists should decrease.

It is a given that panelists must have no previous relationship with any of the candidates. Journalists are often chosen because of their presumed neutrality and their familiarity with the election process and the issues. But consider academic or "think tank" issue specialists, a representative from your organization or from a civic group, a prominent citizen or a student (perhaps chosen through an essay contest) for a place on the panel.

Should the candidates have a role in the choice of a panel? If it were up to them, they would not look just for familiar faces, but for friendly ones. Do not allow candidates to have veto power over panelists. If they insist on having a say, allow each candidate a limited number of choices from a list of potential panelists, and make the final selection with those choices in mind. Settle panel selection early and announce the panel members publicly to avoid last-minute candidate objections.

Choosing A Moderator In the standard question-and-timed-response format, the moderator acts like an MC, introducing the participants and explaining what is happening. If there is a panel, the moderator does not even have to ask the questions. As the format becomes more flexible and open, the moderator's roles grow more complex and demanding. For example, in a cross-talk or cross-questioning format, the moderator must raise issues, manage the discussion, ask appropriate unprepared follow-up questions and make sure each candidate is treated fairly and has an equal opportunity to speak -- in other words, act like a talk-show host without the ego.

So whether you select your organization's president or the broadcaster's best on-air talent as your moderator depends on what the moderator will be expected to do. Some characteristics to look for:

- neutrality - the candidates will insist on a neutral moderator, but make sure your choice has had no identification with any of the candidates, parties or issues in the election;
- authority - the moderator must manage the candidates and control the audience -- timidity and gentility will not work;
- confidence - the moderator should be at ease with the medium and the format;
- spontaneity - even the most rigid of debate formats are not immune from surprise, and flexible formats require a lot of fast thinking;
- knowledge - the moderator should know the issues in sufficient depth to keep a response or a discussion on target; if the format allows follow-up questions, the moderator should know when the topic has been covered and the candidates' positions are clear;
- understanding - the moderator should be familiar with the sponsor's organization and its goals for the debate and should have a clear understanding of the format.

If your debate is being broadcast, the broadcaster can help find a good moderator; indeed, most broadcasters welcome the opportunity to give their on-air talent such distinguished exposure. While it is important to consider the candidates' various concerns in choosing a moderator, do not give the candidates a veto. The moderator represents the interests of the sponsor and the public and should be independent of the candidates.

Working with the Moderator and Panelists Establish a professional relationship with the moderator and panelists (if any). Agreements should be in writing and stipends (if any) and the payment of expenses should be specified. In your
letter of invitation, state your expectations for the role of the moderator or panelists, the topics to be covered and any briefings, rehearsals or other events they are expected to attend. Make sure moderators and panelists are well informed about your organization's decisions and rationale about formats, settings, broadcast arrangements, site, etc., but invite them to make suggestions for changes and improvements. It is important for the participants to be comfortable with the final arrangements. Provide copies of any written agreements with candidates, format descriptions or arrangements with broadcasters or management at the site.

Discuss the role the moderator or panelists will play in asking questions or introducing topics. Experienced journalists usually do not need or want written questions. However, as a sponsor, you should have some control over the content of the debate. Make your expectations clear. Discuss your goals for the debate and the issues you expect the candidates to address; provide a list of topics to be covered and suggestions for questions. Supply the moderator with a script or notes for introductions, credits, instructing the audience, explaining the rules, etc.

A written schedule of the times, places and agendas for briefings and rehearsals (if any) is useful. Specify when the moderator and panelists are to be at the debate site and invite them to any planned activities before or after the debate. Allow sufficient time for the moderator to meet the candidates and to instruct the on-site audience on its role and expected behavior.

About a week before the debate, meet with the moderator and panelists to go over debate plans and make sure there is mutual understanding and agreement on the proceedings. If you are using a panel, go over their planned questions to see that they are not duplicative and that they cover a range of issues. If you are using a new or complex format, have a dry run or mock debate to ensure it will work as expected.
CHAPTER 6
NEGOTIATING WITH CANDIDATES

So all you have to do is design the perfect debate, invite the candidates and they will come --- right? Well, maybe. Candidates in relatively minor elections, and those who are challenging powerful incumbents are grateful for any free opportunity to appear before the public and may, indeed, jump at the chance to debate, even on your terms.

But debates are big risks for candidates, especially front-runners, who usually have the most to lose and the least to gain from participation in a debate. Candidates have seen their chances for election slip away because of one debate gaffe. Candidates running for major offices, with sufficient funds to buy time on radio or television, may try to trade their agreement to debate for conditions that will show them off most favorably. Or they may play off one debate sponsor against others, looking for the best terms.

Increasing public expectations that candidates will appear in a debate makes it politically costly for most candidates to refuse outright. But candidates will try to exact conditions from sponsors that give them control over how the debate is run -- over format, site, panelists, content, audience, for example. More and more often, candidates bypass the sponsors and negotiate conditions among themselves, presenting the sponsor with a "done deal." The result may be a debate that showcases the candidates at their best, but provides little useful information to voters -- or a debate that is so blatantly unfair, the sponsor must withdraw.

Getting Ready to Negotiate  To maintain control over a debate, the sponsor should be prepared to negotiate terms with the candidates (or, in the case of elections for major offices, the candidates' staff.) The goal of negotiations is to ensure the participation of the invited candidates in a fair, impartial debate that will help voters make informed election choices. Keep in mind that a debate must include at least two candidates. In a two-person race, you cannot threaten a recalcitrant candidate with an "empty-chair" debate that gives the opponent a free ride (see Chapter 2).

Start planning for negotiations as soon as the list of potential candidates becomes clear. In preparation for negotiations you need two kinds of information:

1. Information about the candidates, the election and the political climate in which it is being held;

   Know the candidates' strengths, weaknesses and major concerns -- especially attitudes toward and past experiences with debates. Understand the dynamics of the election -- who's ahead, who has the most to lose or gain from debates, how many candidates will run, how many debates are likely to occur and the potential debate sponsors. Consider the candidates' schedules, how many debates they will probably agree to, and when. Understand the political climate -- the public demand for the candidates to debate, the level of contentiousness, the prevalence of personal attacks and the major issues as seen by the candidates and by the public.

2. Be certain about your goals as a sponsor, and how you aim to reach them;

   Have a clear general idea of how you want the debate to proceed, a mental picture of your "ideal" debate. This should include ideas about format, content, questioners, site, timing and scheduling (i.e., close to the election or several weeks before). As you plan your debate, keep in mind what you know about the candidates and the campaign. For example, in a mud-slinging contest, you should plan a more controlled format to keep the focus on issues, not personalities.

   Decide what is negotiable and what is fixed, what compromises you are willing to make and what matters of principle are off the table. Sponsors must protect the fairness and impartiality of the debate. They should control decisions about which candidates are invited to participate (consistent with the criteria they have adopted.) Candidates should not dictate (or know in advance) what questions they will be asked or have veto power over the selection of moderators or panelists.

The Negotiating Team  Designate a team of at least two people to handle negotiations with candidates -- one to talk and one to listen and take notes. You may decide not to include the president or head of your organization on the team so
that you have a "higher authority" to go to for official approval of tentative agreements. Above all, the negotiating team should be well informed and confident, fair and professional. It should be prepared to keep control of the negotiating process to ensure the rights of all the participating candidates.

The team should come to negotiations with the following:

- the legal conditions for debates -- what can and cannot be done under the laws and regulations;
- information about the organization's debate history -- what has worked and what has not; the organization's credentials as an effective and fair debate sponsor;
- the organization's initial proposals for the debate;
- debate options -- different formats, sites, dates, questioners, etc. and the advantages and disadvantages of each option;
- information about the candidates' backgrounds, history of debate participation and political concerns.

The Negotiating Process  The first approach to the candidates is the letter of invitation to participate in the debate. (Send the letters by registered mail so you have proof that they were received.) Include as few specifics as possible in the letters. You want to avoid getting an instant refusal because the candidate doesn't like the proposed format or can't appear on the suggested date. Instead, inform the candidate that a representative of your organizations will be in contact to arrange for a meeting.

It is best to hold the initial discussions with each candidate (or staff) separately and under conditions of confidentiality. Start with the strongest (and probably most difficult) candidate, if you can. Once you have an agreement with the front-runner, you can bring it to the other candidates for approval or modification.

Develop an agenda for your meeting, but be flexible. Start with the major issues -- the date, the format, the content, the questioners. Once you agree on the essentials, the details may never become an issue. However, if one or more candidates want assurances about the ground rules or details of the debate -- such as the setting, audience, use of notes, arrangements for news coverage, etc. -- provide them with a written description of your plans and discuss possible modifications.

If and when the candidates disagree, it is time to bring them together to work out an agreement. The negotiating team should be present to protect the organization's interests and goals and to ensure that the debate will be fair and impartial.

The final result of the negotiations should be a written agreement signed by each candidate (even if all prior discussions were with the campaign staff) and the chief officer of the sponsoring organization. This agreement may be as general or specific as necessary. It should be a public document and, if appropriate, made available to the news media. If you cannot reach agreement on a debate that meets your organization's goals and is fair, impartial and informative, you may decide to withdraw sponsorship. Be sure that the candidates know that if you decide to withdraw, you will make a public announcement of your decision and the reasons for it.

After negotiations, keep the candidates informed about arrangements not included in the agreement, such as ticket distribution, debate furniture, photo opportunities, press coverage, etc. If there are objections, you will still have time to make adjustments.

**Major Sticking Points and How to Resolve Them**

**Participation in the Debate** Once you have the candidates' written or publicly announced commitment to participate in your debate, it becomes easier to resolve other issues. Try to commit them to debate as soon as possible. For example, if you are conducting primary debates, ask the candidates to agree to participate in general election debates if they win. Or get a written commitment to participate in response to your initial invitation.

Of course, candidates may hold back on committing to debate until they get agreement on the most favorable conditions. If there are several potential sponsors, they may shop around for the best terms. Despite the political risk, a
candidate may decide that, no matter what, participation in a debate will hurt more than it will help.

There are ways to persuade a reluctant candidate to debate. Get the news media on your side. Make an early media announcement of your plans to stage a debate. Contact editorial boards and get their endorsements. Involve the public by, for example, asking them to submit questions. Hold essay and poster contests in schools. In other words, make the debate seem inevitable, and raise public expectations to the point where the candidate's refusal to debate will carry a very high political cost.

However, if a candidate has weighed the costs and benefits of taking part in your debate and has decided to sit it out, there is not much more that you can do about it. If there are at least two candidates eligible and willing to debate, you are under an obligation to them to go ahead and hold the debate -- but you cannot hold, or threaten to hold, a "debate" with only one candidate.

Even after all your efforts have failed, continue to make your case to the public. Your organization should get credit for its good faith effort to serve the voters. And, there is always another election coming up.

Scheduling. Scheduling a debate often is a real problem for candidates. There are many conflicting demands on a candidate's time during a campaign. Incumbents must schedule debates and other campaign appearances around their duties as public officials. Legislators must be on hand for important votes.

There are tactical considerations as well. A weak debater may prefer an early debate, so there is plenty of time to recover before the election. A candidate who expects to do well may prefer an early debate to gain momentum and attract campaign funders, or a late debate to knock off an opponent and influence undecided voters.

Sponsors should schedule debates when interest is high and coverage will be good, but not so close to an election that charges made by candidates cannot be answered. They should be sensitive to candidates' concerns, for example, by holding debates on weekends when legislatures are not in session or after the session is over (although in recent years, the U.S. Congress seems to be adjourning later and later, even in election years).

Once agreement is reached on the scheduling of a debate, the date should not be changed except for a genuine emergency (a candidate's illness, a death in the family, a natural disaster, etc.). Candidates may try to change the date because of unforeseen events, such as last-minute visits from party bigwigs or a late legislative session. A previously scheduled -- and promoted -- debate should take precedence over such conflicts. The sponsor should, however, make every effort to accommodate a candidate's legitimate concern, for example by allowing the candidate to "appear" in the debate via satellite transmission from Washington or the state capital.

The best way to hold candidates to their scheduling commitments is to get a firm agreement as early as possible, publicize the debate date widely as soon as agreement is reached and firmly maintain that the debate is an important campaign event that should not be preempted.

Audience. If the debate is not televised, there will be an audience at the site where the debate is held. If the debate is televised, a "live" audience is an option, not a requirement. Some candidates are at their best before a live audience, especially if it is heavily loaded with a cheering section of their friends and supporters. Others worry about the potential for disruption and prefer the security of a broadcast studio. Sponsors may want the excitement and liveliness of an audience, whose members represent the voting public. On the other hand, they may not want the expense and bother of getting a site, sending out invitations and assuring security. It is no wonder that audience questions are controversial.

Let the candidates know your needs and preferences up front. If you cannot afford a hall or the broadcaster insists on a studio setting, the issue is non-negotiable. If you do decide on an audience, work with the candidates on ground rules that cover everyone's concerns:

- Audience selection: ticket only; by invitation; free entry.
- The number of tickets each candidate will get for staff, supporters and family.
- Rules governing audience reaction: silence; no booing, cheering or whistling; applause only.
- Questions from the audience: will they be allowed? will they be solicited beforehand? will they be screened?
will they be asked by the audience member or the moderator?

**Formats** Candidates tend to prefer tried-and-true debate formats. With so much at risk, they don't want any more surprises than necessary. Even candidates who have never debated feel comfortable facing a panel of familiar media types. Sponsors, however, want to open up the debate format, encouraging interaction between the candidates. They want to avoid a dull, overly rigid debate formula.

You will have taken the candidates' preferences, strengths and weaknesses, and the nature of the contest, into consideration when designing your debate. The result may well be several segments, each with a different format, geared to the candidates' debating styles (or a series of debates, each with a different format.)

If the candidates still balk at your preferred formats:

- point out the advantages and disadvantages of each format;
- show clips of debates using the various formats;
- get testimonials from former candidates who have participated in your proposed format.

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**EXAMPLES OF GROUNDRULES**

These are examples of debate details that should be resolved before the debate occurs:

There will be no substitutes or stand-ins for the candidates.

All news releases about the debate will be handled by the sponsoring organization and sent simultaneously to all the candidates. Confidentiality of the debate negotiations will be maintained by the candidates and by the sponsor.

Each candidate will have access to the site several hours before the debate to check on the lighting, acoustics and set design.

No campaign banners, signs, literature handouts or other campaign paraphernalia will be allowed in the debate hall.

The audience will be asked to refrain from applauding or in other ways demonstrating support or nonsupport for a candidate.

There will be no audience reaction shots during the debate, although panning of the audience before and after the debate may be allowed.

The moderator will introduce the candidates using a 15-second introduction provided by the candidates.

Candidates will be introduced by title. Thereafter, "Mr." and "Ms." will be used.

The winner of a coin toss on the day of the debate will have first choice of podium position.

The candidates will remain behind the podiums at all times during the debate. Stools will be provided.

A pitcher of water and a glass will be on a shelf in each podium.

The candidates will bring no notes or props. Each candidate will be provided with a legal pad and pens for taking notes during the debate.

There will be a coin toss to determine candidates' order of taking the first question and making closing statements.

Time limits on responses will be strictly observed. A timekeeper will hold cards, visible to the speaker, indicating how much time remains. When the "stop card" is shown, the speaker must end his/her speech within 10 seconds.
The moderator will have the responsibility for enforcing time limits. The moderator also will have the authority to interrupt the proceedings to enforce the ground rules and format that were agreed to by the candidates.

The moderator may restate the question.

The panelists and moderator may interrupt the candidates if they believe the candidates are straying from the subject.

The candidates will not interrupt one another.

The candidates' closing statements should be significantly related to the matters debated previously. Because there is no opportunity for rebuttal following the closing statements, candidates should refrain from personal attacks or charges.

No flash cameras and no motor driven cameras will be used during the debate.

Photographers and the press will be placed at a reasonable distance from the candidates and microphones to reduce distractions.

A press area will be provided near the entrance to the debate for arrival and departure photographs of the candidates and interviews after the debate if the candidates wish to speak to the press.

Candidates are invited to remain for a reception and a news media availability following the debate.
CHAPTER 7
BROADCASTING YOUR DEBATE

What if you held a debate and nobody came -- or watched or listened? Without an audience, a debate is an exercise in futility. That is why it is important to put just as much energy and planning into promoting your debate -- and getting it into people's homes via television, radio or cable -- as into the debate itself.

A debate does not have to be broadcast to be successful. A hotly contested campaign that generates a lot of interest may attract a large on-site audience. Or you can hold a debate before a captive audience at a school, college or work place, or at a civic association meeting or for your own members.

But it is getting more difficult to get people to come out to meetings and events. Time has become a scarce resource. Fortunately, with a growing number of broadcast outlets, it is becoming easier than ever to get a debate on the air. Now that debates are an expected part of a political campaign, broadcasters who know about your debate may very well come to you with offers to air it.

Broadcasters themselves are becoming more and more active as debate sponsors. If your organization is known for its experience with debates, one or more broadcasters may seek you out for assistance. If you can work out an arrangement that meets your goals -- with special attention to issues involving control and credit -- this kind of partnership may prove a very effective way to get information about candidates to voters. Keep in mind that the interested broadcaster is likely to stage a debate with or without your cooperation.

Choosing a Broadcaster

Your choice of a broadcaster depends, to some extent, on the audience you are trying to reach. In a debate for a statewide office or in a wide ranging congressional district, you may need more than one station to cover the jurisdiction. In a large county or city, your best bet may often be a major network outlet (including PBS). But in a small municipality or rural county, you do not need the reach of a metropolitan station.

Commercial and public television stations and cable outlets that devote much of their programming to news and public affairs have a built-in audience for debates. And don't write off local cable channels. About 75 percent of Americans now have access to cable, and surveys show that about 50 percent of cable subscribers watch community access channels on a regular basis. Such channels are eager for program material, and will be happy to show a debate not just once but several times.

Radio is more fragmented than television, and does not hold an audience in the same way. People tend to listen while driving or as background to some other activity. However, the proliferation of all-talk or all-news stations and the popularity of talk shows has brought avid listeners to programs focused on public affairs. Whether your debate is televised or not, use radio to promote your debate and to reach special audiences, such as ethnic and racial minorities, older people or rural residents.

In making your choice, consider how much overall promotion a broadcaster is willing to contribute to the debate, and what other in-kind contributions are offered, such as:

- a clean feed (no station identification) to stations in other media markets;
- mult boxes (a sound system with multiple outlets);
- television monitors for the news media or overflow viewing;
- lighting;
- house sound and audience seating (if in studio);
- backdrop and furniture for the set;
- microphones for participants;
- make-up for participants.
**Contacting Broadcasters**

Contact a variety of broadcasters as soon as you can tell them about the initial plans for your debate. Broadcasters will be more likely to carry your debate if they are part of the planning process, but they will also want assurances that you can get the major candidates to commit to participation.

Start off by sending letters to the general managers (or equivalent) of selected broadcast outlets. Your letter should be strong and persuasive, and include a brief outline of your debate plans. Play up the debate's importance as a public service and its appeal to an influential audience. Follow up promptly with a phone call requesting an appointment with the staff members responsible for making programming decisions (at large stations, the station manager or program director will be involved in the decision, as well as the news or public affairs director; in smaller stations, one person may take several of these roles.)

Bring to the meeting a packet of material that includes:

- information about your organization, its goals for the debate and its previous debate experience;
- your criteria for candidate participation in the debate;
- any testimonials you may have from other broadcasters who have worked with you;
- a description of your debate plans up to this point, including formats, site suggestions and promotion plans
- written commitments from candidates (if you have them).

Come prepared with your ideas, but be willing to consider suggestions from the pros. Be very clear about which issues are up for discussion and which are non-negotiable.

The outcome of your discussions should be a written agreement that covers the major responsibilities of your organization and the broadcaster. The agreement is just the beginning of your working relationship with the broadcaster and will not cover all the details involved in a debate.

**Potential Sticking Points**

**Scheduling** Finding a good date, day and time to air a debate can be difficult. Broadcasters will want to avoid important sporting events, ratings sweeps, and season premieres (all of which come in the fall, during the general election campaigns). Broadcasters will not want to "bump" a popular program for a debate or have a debate lead into an important show or the local nightly news. Be aware of the broadcaster's concerns and try to work around them. Suggest a time-slot usually filled by a public affairs program. If you cannot work out a mutually agreeable time-slot, ask the broadcaster to air a tape of the debate as soon after it occurs as possible.

**Exclusivity** You want your debate to be seen by as wide an audience as possible and certainly over the entire jurisdiction covered by the election. But the station, having put a lot of its own resources into the debate, wants exclusive rights to its broadcast. Compromise by giving the station "market exclusivity," allowing it the right to exclude other stations in the same viewing area, but ask for a "clean feed" (transmission without the station’s identification) to a station in another part of the state or congressional district. Or seek permission for another station to air a tape of the debate at a later time or date. Your broadcaster may agree to simultaneous or delayed coverage by a station with a different audience, such as a public broadcasting station or a local cable outlet.

**Debate News Coverage** Work with the broadcaster to assure access and facilities for news reporters, including still photographers and debate footage for newscasts on other stations. Reporters should be able to watch the debate live or on monitors on-site.

**Moderator and Panel** Many stations consider a debate an excellent opportunity to showcase their star anchor as moderator. If the moderator demanded by the station meets your requirements for impartiality, authority and knowledge and is willing to work with your format and issues, he or she may be a good choice. If not, and the station is adamant, perhaps you should be looking for another broadcaster. Do not let the broadcaster stack the panel (if there is one) with its on-air talent nor dictate the choice of panelists.
Retaining Rights  The broadcasters will be just as concerned as you are that tapes of the debate not be used for partisan campaign ads or other unsuitable purposes. Let the broadcaster know if you have any plans for rebroadcasting the debate (for example, on C-SPAN or local cable) but don't give up your rights (see: Copyrights, Chapter 2, Legal Considerations).

Commercials  If the station insists on selling advertising time during the debate, make sure that any ads come at a logical break and do not disrupt the proceedings. Do not allow political ads, even for other offices, during and immediately before and after the debate.

The Debate Site  The broadcasting station may prefer that you hold the debate in its studio. If you agree, but want an audience, make sure its facilities are adequate. Work with the broadcaster on a set and background that meet your standards and are acceptable to the candidates. If you are planning a debate at a special location -- a historic building, a university or a large auditorium, for example -- make sure it has the technical facilities the broadcaster needs. Most larger stations now have the technical resources to broadcast easily and routinely from a remote site.

Control  The most difficult issue to resolve with a broadcaster is the most fundamental. Who is in charge? If you are producing a debate and the broadcaster is covering it, maintain your control. You should, of course, work with the broadcasting staff to make their job easier and take their suggestions into consideration, but you have the final say on the major decisions. If you are cosponsoring with a broadcaster, make sure that areas of responsibility are laid out clearly and in writing; important decisions should be mutually agreed to. If a broadcaster is putting on the debate and asks for your help, be equally clear about areas of responsibility and matters of credit, but the broadcaster has the final say. Do not, however, allow your organization's name to be used in connection with a debate that violates your organization's principles or does not meet its standards.

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Examples of Issues to be Settled Between Sponsor and Broadcaster

- Who decides on the format?
- Will the station have a person on the panel or as moderator? What exclusivity is involved -- i.e., no other people for competing broadcast stations?
- Who chooses the moderator and panelists?
- Will the head of the sponsoring organization make a statement? What other involvement will the sponsor have in the actual broadcast?
- Will the station place the program in a time period that will attract an information-oriented audience?
- How much promotion will the station dedicate to the debate?
- How many days before the debate will the on-air promotion begin?
- How often will the promotion be run?
- Who will produce the promo?
- How will the promotion represent the relationship between the station and the sponsor?
- Will the station buy advertising on other media (radio, newspaper, TV Guide) to promote the debate?
- Will the television station produce a public service announcement for the sponsor?
- Who will send news releases to the media and who will approve them?
- Will organization representatives be available to talk about the debate with other media?
- Will the station notify listing services of debate times?
- Will the sponsor or the station organize any activities to promote the debate?
- Who pays for the facility used for the debate?
- Who pays for security for the debate?
- Who coordinates access to the debate (for media, the sponsoring organization's officers and members, the public), including issuing invitations and distributing tickets?
- Who pays for the production costs (set design, signs on the set, personnel costs, talent feeds or, if not in studio, lights, electricity, transmission of signal to the studio)?
- What kinds of signs will be used on the set?
- What, if any, credits will the sponsor want to display at the beginning and end of the telecast?
• How will the telecast reflect the relationship between the sponsor and the television station?
• Who will pay for the transmission of the debate to other stations?
• If any legal costs are incurred during the production of the televised debate, who pays the legal fees?
• Who owns the rights to the debate?
CHAPTER 8
PROMOTING THE DEBATE

In order to get voters to come or tune in to the debate, you must promote it effectively. Good promotion of your debate accomplishes several goals:

✓ Getting candidates to agree to debate - Reinforcing citizens' expectations that there will be a debate will make it more difficult and politically costly for candidates to back out of participation.

✓ Locking in agreements - Informing the public about commitments from candidates, panelists and broadcasters will make pulling out of an agreement to participate less likely.

✓ Attracting an audience - This includes providing basic information (date, time, location, broadcast availability, candidates, office sought), and creating an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation about the debate.

✓ Informing the electorate - The actual debate audience will be only a fraction of the number of people who will benefit from the debate. Post-debate news stories and commentary will provide information about the candidates, their performance in the debate and their positions on issues to many more potential voters.

A Promotion Strategy

If your organization is not familiar with promotion techniques, this is the time to study up. Look to your library for publications that provide advice on working with media and basic promotion techniques. The League of Women Voters publication, *Getting Good Media Coverage* (available from the League of Women Voters of the United States, 1730 M Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036, 202-429-1965, Pub. #1000, $2.50 ($2.00 for members)) provides information about the basics, such as effective news releases and press lists, editorial board meetings and radio and television interviews. Get advice from other organizations, including your broadcaster.

Coordinate your promotion schedule with the major participants (candidates, broadcaster, your organization's officers). Before you issue a news release, notify anyone whose name appears in the release. Do not put someone in the position of answering questions about a release they know nothing about.
There are many opportunities for promotion as you plan, produce and evaluate a debate. Take advantage of them. Some newsworthy events include:

- a formal decision to have a debate is made;
- you announce your criteria for candidate participation;
- a candidate has committed to participate;
- a moderator has been selected;
- the debate date, time and site are confirmed;
- a broadcast arrangement has been made;
- the post-debate comments and ratings are in.

**Developing Good Media Relations**

Designate one person - usually the head of the organization - to be the spokesperson and one person (the debate manager or the promotion coordinator) to maintain contact with the media and be available to respond to routine questions and requests for information.

Develop a list of media contacts. Newspapers and broadcast outlets in your community can be found in the *Gebbie Press All-In-One Directory*, the *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook*, or the *Broadcasting and Cablecasting Yearbook*, available in libraries. State broadcasting associations can provide information on local stations.

Include the wire services on your list. They supply news to many broadcasters and small newspapers. Check out the datelines on stories in your local newspaper, and find out if they originate from the Associated Press (AP) or United Press International (UPI). Other news services include Gannett News Service, Copley News Service and the services of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. The wire services maintain "daybooks," listings of the events taking place in the community on any given day. UPI and AP have the most comprehensive daybooks. List all debate activities, including news briefings and related public events as well as the debate itself.

Call newspapers and broadcasting stations to find out who on their staff covers political news and should receive your news releases. They might include:

**Television stations and radio stations**: station manager, program director, news director, assignment editor.

**Newspapers**: political reporters, political columnists, city desk, editor.

Send basic debate information -- date, site and participants -- to all the outlets on your list. Select key contacts to receive special attention. Send them news releases to announce important events, invite them to news conferences and briefings and arrange to meet with them to arrange for feature stories, debates coverage and editorial support.

**Promotion Techniques**

Use a variety of techniques to promote your debate. There are three major categories:

1. **Paid Promotion** includes everything from paid newspaper and television ads to posters and flyers. When you pay for promotion, you can count on getting your message out and you can control the content and the timing.

**Posters, Notices and Flyers**:

- Post in public places, shopping centers, libraries, and schools and hand out at community and political meetings.
- Use bright eye-catching colors and graphics.
- Keep short and uncluttered - include date, time, site and broadcast times, candidates and electoral contest.
- Include a phone number for further information.
Print Ads:

- Costs are high, so consider placement and timing carefully.
- Run ads as close to the debate date as possible.
- Advertise a broadcast debate on the television page or in the weekly TV guide.
- Use logo or photographs for eye appeal.
- If your organization is nonprofit, try to get an in-kind contribution toward the cost of an ad.
- If you are working with a broadcaster, ask the station to buy advertising in the newspaper and the TV Guide.
- Don't neglect less costly outlets, such as weekly neighborhood papers and specialized newspapers aimed at ethnic or racial minorities.

Radio Ads:

- Radio ads are relatively inexpensive.
- To reach a diverse audience, spread ads among different stations and different times.
- Work with station's advertising manager on message and placement.
- Use a pre-produced, taped or scripted announcement.

Television Ads:

- Network affiliates and large urban stations are probably prohibitively expensive and may include a much larger viewing area than you need.
- Seek in-kind contributions and cooperation from your broadcaster, including production of a "promo," a short 30- or 10-second spot announcement of an upcoming program.
- Investigate independent stations and cable outlets.
- Begin on-air promotion no sooner than seven days before the debate.
- The ad should reflect the excitement and importance of the debate, using pictures and graphics and should include, on screen and in voice-over, the debate date, time and channel.

2. Unpaid or Free Publicity includes editorials, news stories, appearances on newscasts and talk shows and public service announcements (PSAs) on radio and television. You have to work hard for free publicity and it cannot be controlled or predicted, but it can be very effective.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs):

- Free air time is offered to nonprofit organizations by radio and television stations to fulfill their public service obligations.
- You must produce the spot, a 30- or 10-second announcement, and "sell" stations into airing it.
- Contact television and radio stations before you invest in production of a video or audio PSA. The public service director will give you information about the station's preferred length and form and its deadlines. Also, find out if the station is likely to air your PSA.
- Send your PSAs to stations in an attractive package; the outside label should include the title of the spot, your name, the dates it should be aired, the running times and format (i.e., for television, film or video tape; for radio, prerecorded disc, audiotape, cassette or script).

Free Print Ads:

- Contact editors of Sunday television supplements and daily television columns. Ask to have the debate listed as a feature event.
- If your debate is airing on a public broadcast station, try to get a story or announcement in its subscriber newsletter.
- Find out if any local newspapers offer free ad space to nonprofit organizations.
Free Listings:

- Submit announcements to newspapers and broadcast stations for their regularly scheduled Calendar of Events or Community Bulletin Board.
- Find out deadline and preferred length and form beforehand.

News Coverage:

- A debate is news. Keep the media informed about the progress of your debate from the initial announcement to the final evaluation.
- Put together a press kit. Include a "backgrounder," a packet of basic information about your debate (goals, criteria, who, what and when), packaged with a brief updated progress report and any current news releases. Hand out at news conferences and debate events and send in response to inquiries.
- Send out (preferably, by FAX and mail) news releases, as appropriate, to the key media contacts on your list. To ensure coverage of a debate or related special event, follow up with a phone call. Send releases to announce:
  - your decision to sponsor a debate;
  - criteria for candidate participation;
  - receipt of a large contribution;
  - candidates invited to participate;
  - broadcast arrangements;
  - the debate - date, time, site, format, questioners, major issues.
- If you have never written a news release, find out the standard form in a reference book on media relations or in the League of Women Voters *Guide to Getting Good Media Coverage*.
- If you have a major announcement that will provoke questions and result in real news, call a news conference. Send a media advisory (invitation) with just enough information to provoke interest without giving your story away. A news conference starts with a prepared statement followed by questions and answers and lasts about ten minutes. Be prepared to answer questions unrelated to your opening statement or even the debate.
- Try for a feature story. If a newspaper or television newscaster has shown particular interest in the planning or negotiations for your debate, suggest a feature on the upcoming debate.
- If you are having problems with a reluctant candidate or if the debate has become controversial, use the media to get your side on the record. Call editorial page editors or broadcast news directors, request an appointment and send ahead briefing materials and information to support your case.
- Send an op-ed article or letter-to-the-editor to your area's major newspaper.
- Tell your story on the air. Try to get invited to local radio and television talk and call-in shows.

Debate Coverage:

- Many people will view your debate. Even more will learn about what the candidates said in their newspapers or on broadcast news. Make it easy for the media to cover your debate.
- Make sure key media know about the debate date and time early enough to clear their calendars.
- Set aside space for the media at the debate site. If space is limited, allocate it fairly. Limit the number from each media outlet and issue press credentials on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- Make arrangements for still and video cameras.
- Arrange for media interviews with the candidates after the debate (if candidates agree.)

3. Person to Person Promotion:

Get the public interested in the debate through special events such as asking for debate questions, student debates, essay contests or voter participation drives. Put debate notices in the newsletters of other groups, in church bulletins and corporate and union publications. Make it easy and attractive for your own members to come to the debate and bring guests.
CHAPTER 9
THE PRODUCTION
SITES, SETS, AUDIENCES AND LAST-MINUTE DETAILS

Site Selection and Review

Choosing a debate site involves both symbolism and logistics. The site sends a message about the goals and tone of the debate. It must meet the candidates' and the broadcaster's requirements. Choose a site that is convenient for your members and for an audience (if any), that has the necessary facilities and conforms to your budget.

Location  Debates should be held in the jurisdiction covered by the election. For elections that cover large geographical areas, such as for governor or senator, the debate should be held in a central location, in the capital city or wherever the sponsor or the broadcaster is based. If others also are sponsoring debates for the same electoral contest, you may want to consider another major city for your debate. Candidates may vie to hold debates in places where they have the most supporters. If possible, avoid holding a statewide debate in any candidate's home town.

The choice of location can affect the issues that will be discussed; for example, farm policy will come up in a rural area, trade issues in a port city, urban issues and economic development in a city center.

Auditorium vs. Broadcasting Studio  Whether you hold your debate in a public or university auditorium, or in a broadcast studio depends on the broadcaster's requirements, the candidates' preferences and the sponsor's wishes. Studio debates tend to be more convenient and less costly and to have better technical facilities and security. The broadcaster is more likely to foot the bill for the set and the technical facilities. Some disadvantages of a studio debate include:

- no space for a large audience;
- a tendency for the broadcaster to treat the debate like any other program and take over control of decisions;
- a staff that is responsive to the broadcaster but not to the sponsor;
- less access for other media, especially competing broadcasters.

If you decide on a studio debate, work with your broadcaster to resolve these problems. Clarify division of responsibility for making decisions. Ask for facilities for the press and others to view the debate in a press room or viewing room. Use signs or your logo to make your organization's role visually apparent on the set and on the screen.

A debate in an auditorium with a large audience makes for a livelier program with more visual variety and interest. An audience serves as a symbol of the candidates' accountability to the voters. The site can take on more symbolic overtones if the debate is held in an historic building, for example, or a restored theater in the inner city or even at a suburban shopping mall.

Evaluating a Site. Some considerations in choosing a debate site include the following:

Cost. Will a cosponsor or donor provide a site as an in-kind contribution? What charges are involved (rent, maintenance, staff, security, parking, stage set-up, electricity, phone hook-ups, and television cables)? Insist on a written contract that includes all charges so there will be no surprises.

Accessibility. Is the site convenient for the expected audience and the media? Is it accessible for the physically disabled? Is there sufficient parking? Public transportation? Can television equipment be brought in? Is the site available at least 12 hours before the debate so broadcasters and set builders can set up?

Broadcast Suitability. Are adequate equipment and services available (lighting, power, house sound, satellite capacity,
uplink and downlink capacity, etc.) or can it be brought in? Are there wide enough aisles for television cameras? Is there adequate air conditioning to compensate for the heat of television lights? Will noise from traffic, airplanes, construction, etc. interfere with broadcasting? Is the ceiling high enough for lights? Go over the technical attributes of the site with your broadcasters. Keep in mind the needs of other broadcasters that are covering the debate. Know in advance the cost of making the site suitable for broadcasting.

Staging. Is there a stage that will accommodate your set, or can one be constructed? Will the site supply podiums, chairs, stools, etc.?

Security. Is the location secure (in an area where demonstrations or other disruptions are unlikely)? Can all entrances be monitored or safely secured? Are any potentially disruptive activities occurring at the site or nearby (athletic events, labor disputes/picketing, construction, political rallies?) Can demonstrators outside the site be heard or seen from inside? Can they block access? Will the site provide security guards as needed? Is there an additional charge?

Insurance. Who is responsible for liability insurance? Is there an additional charge? (A hotel or convention center probably carries its own insurance; a university or library might want to add a "rider" to an existing policy to cover the debate).

Audience. What is the seating capacity of the hall (about 500 - 1,000 is best for a statewide debate, for example)? Can the audience see around the television cameras.

Media Coverage. Is the site convenient and accessible to media? Are there sufficient telephone lines? A press room with desks, telephones and television monitors? Is there a good location for still photographers?

Other Facilities. Are there holding rooms for candidates; holding rooms for moderator and/or panelists; make-up facilities; space for refreshments (for volunteers, participants and media representatives)?

Advance Work - Checking Out the Site

There is no substitute for a personal inspection of a debate site before it is selected. No description or diagram can give you the feel or the atmosphere of a site. No floor plan can assure that the ceilings are high enough or that the audience can see the stage despite the television cameras. Bring a checklist to the inspection visit, and have a clear idea of what are essential requirements and what are just added conveniences. Go over your checklist with your broadcaster and bring someone with the necessary technical expertise with you. Try to visit the site at the same time of day that the debate will be held in order to check on traffic, parking and noise.

Once the site has been selected, go over all the arrangements, in detail, with the responsible person on the staff of the selected site. Insist on a written contract that spells out all costs and facilities provided.

A week before the event, review all the arrangements with the site staff once again. Include all your requirements, such as the time that various participants -- broadcaster, set builder, debate staff, volunteers, etc. -- must have access. Note what services must be provided by in-house technical, security or maintenance staff. Determine what signs are needed to direct the public and the media (both inside and outside the site) and where they should be placed. Make any necessary parking arrangements, designating space for the disabled, television vans, candidates and their staff and debate staff.

Walk through the site, from the main entrance to the auditorium, the backstage area, press and holding rooms. Determine what route candidates should take to get to the holding rooms and the backstage area without encountering the press or the audience before the debate.

As you go through each of the rooms you will be using, go over the equipment that should be in that room, who will provide it, when it will be needed and when the room must be available.

You can adapt the following checklist to your needs:
SAMPLE CHECKLIST

Debate Room  Open 6 - 8 hours before the debate; need access to room at least 12 hours before the debate.

---- 1. Air conditioning - set at 60 degrees to compensate for television lights.
---- 2. Location of electrical outlets.
---- 3. Location of house phone.
---- 4. Nearest restrooms and public telephones.
---- 5. In-house sound system; sound technician.
---- 6. In-house lighting system; electricians and/or lighting technician.
---- 7. Placement of security personnel.
---- 9. Room Set-up
   a. On stage: height and width of stage or platform, backdrop, podiums, chairs and tables, microphones for candidates, moderator/panelists and others water pitchers (no ice), glasses, napkins
   b. Media platforms - for still photos and television cameras
   c. Mult box
d. Seating - theater style with wide aisles marked reserved seats for candidates' staff and family, debates staff, broadcast staff, timers, VIPs, news reporters
e. location of television cameras
f. television monitors - if site is very large and/or audience visibility is limited.

Note: If you are taking questions from the audience, you will need: cards and pencils for submitting questions, seating for volunteers who collect or screen questions, wide aisles and floor microphones if members of the audience are asking their own questions and a way to get questioners to the mikes with as little disruption as possible.

Lobby or Foyer  Open for staff 6 - 8 hours before debate; for public one and a half hours before debate:

---- 1. Direction signs to auditorium, press table and press room, restrooms, cloakroom and telephones.
---- 2. Table for debate information, check-in.
---- 4. Table with information about your organization.
---- 5. Locations for ushers.
---- 6. Sign for auditorium doors ("Doors will close promptly at 8:45 p.m. Guests are asked not to enter or leave the auditorium until the debate is over.")
---- 7. Television monitors - if needed for debates staff and volunteers who must remain in lobby.

Press Room:

---- 1. Tables or desks and chairs to accommodate credentialed press and media.
---- 2. Phones (one for every five reporters).
---- 4. Television monitor with video recorder (to allow the debate to be replayed as stories are being written).
---- 5. Plain white paper, pencils.
---- 6. Additional press kits.
---- 7. Media advisory notices on the availability or candidates or debate staff after the debate.

Note: The press room, or the room used for post-debate news conferences should have a microphone for the speaker and enough seating for observers and candidates' staff. It should be able to accommodate television news cameras.

Holding Rooms: Separate room for each candidate. The holding rooms provide space for candidates to relax and prepare for the debate in privacy and quiet. If the room is not suitable for applying make-up, a separate room can be equipped for this purpose and used by each candidate in turn. If possible, set aside a room for moderator/panelists to share before and after the debate.
Special Services

---- Security: the need for security will vary, depending on the amount of controversy surrounding the candidates, the campaign and the issues expected to emerge. You will have a pretty good idea beforehand whether to expect problems. You may need the assistance of the local police to handle crowds, traffic or parking. Alert the police if you expect an unusually large crowd, if problems are anticipated or if any threats or rumors of disruption have been received. Work out an understanding with security guards and/or police on careful handling of non-disruptive demonstrators and candidates who were excluded from participation in the debate.

---- Photography: you may want to make arrangements for your own photographer to cover the debate event for your records, for evaluation, and for newsletters, annual reports or reports to funders.

---- Transcripts and Tapes: make advance arrangements if you need transcripts for immediate release after the debate. If you want a transcript for your own record or to give to funders or candidates, you can have them made from video or audio tape recordings. Make arrangements with your broadcaster for professional taping of the debate, especially if it is needed for a delayed broadcast.

---- Facilities for the Disabled: make arrangements with your broadcaster to have the debate close-captioned for the deaf. If there are problems, check with local or state Councils for the Handicapped. If you are using a large auditorium, check for accessibility and use a sign-language interpreter off-camera for the deaf in the auditorium even if you are using close-captioning for the viewing audience.

---- Special Audiences: consider providing taped translations of the debate in languages other than English for radio broadcast and community centers.

Debate Sets

Considerations: Depending on the format and tone of the debate, sets may range from the formality of podiums to the coziness of a living room. Factors to consider in designing a set include:

- Production Values: How the set looks and works on television. The set should look good and give the debate a professional appearance, but should not draw attention away from the debate itself. It should permit flexible, effective use of the television cameras and lights.

- Impartiality: The set should not give any candidate an advantage over another in terms of height, relationship to the moderator or audience, lighting or general appearance. If there are several candidates lined up on the stage, an impartial system of determining their order should be used (by lot, alphabet, etc.).

- Candidate Comfort: Do what you can to make the candidates comfortable and help them relax. Provide stools behind podiums, comfortable furniture and water (no ice - rattling ice is picked up by microphones.) Try to minimize physical differences. Provide step-stools for short candidates and avoid oversize easy chairs. Have the candidates check out the set while adjustments are still possible to prevent any last-minute crises.

- Communication: Design the set so that candidates are addressing the audience -- both on-site and viewing -- and not the panel or moderator. If your format encourages candidate interaction, they should be able to see and address one another.

- Ease of Moderating: Make it easy for the moderator to pay attention to each of the candidates during a cross-talk sequence without looking like a spectator at a tennis match.

- Conflict Management: The placement of candidates in relation to each other can either promote or moderate conflict. For example, candidates sitting next to one another will be more likely to have a discussion, while those standing opposite one another behind podiums might have a confrontation.

Designing the Set Consider the broadcaster's, the candidates' and the audience's needs and preferences in the design of
your debate set. The set that is best for television is not always best for an on-site audience. If you must make compromises, opt in favor of the much larger viewing audience. You can always improve the view of the on-site audience through stage risers, banked seats or, as a last resort, well-placed television monitors. See sample sets and camera placement on pages ----.

Don't neglect your own visibility. Your organization should be identified visually as an important part of the debate. Use a banner on the backdrop, signs on the fronts of podiums or some other means of identifying your organization as the debate sponsor.

Your broadcaster is the expert on adapting the set to the number and location of television cameras. If you can have only one or two cameras, plan your set so everyone on stage can be on camera at the same time. Discuss camera angles with your broadcaster. For example, do you want shots of the entire set to orient the viewing audience, frequent close-ups, or two candidates on screen together (for a cross talk segment)? Do you want only the candidate who is speaking to appear on the screen, or reaction shots of other candidates? Will there be shots of the audience, and how will that affect the layout of the auditorium and the seating (for example, you will want to avoid showing a front row packed with supporters of one candidate, or with students -- the shot should reflect the diversity of the audience.)

If your site has a large stage, you don't have to use all of it, especially if you have only two or three candidates. It is better to have the candidates relatively close together. Use platforms, backdrops, screens, plants or curtains to section off a portion of the stage. Keep the backdrop neutral, but not too dark. Blue is often used. There should be a good contrast between the backdrop and the skin and hair color of the participants. A curtain is fine, but keep it fairly plain - - no patterns, tassels or wrinkles. Keep furniture unobtrusive. If you are adding flags or potted plants, consider how they will look on a television screen. Don't leave the viewing audience wondering about that brass pole in the corner, because the flag it holds is off-screen, or being distracted by the palm tree that seems to be growing out of the moderator's head.

Investigate innovative settings, especially when you are using nontraditional sites or formats. Consider using an arena-type theater, for example, or a legislative chamber. For a broadcast studio debate, get your inspiration from existing television talk shows and public affairs programs -- a table with the moderator at one end, the candidates lined up on either side (Washington Week in Review), a cluster of chairs, informally arranged around the moderator (This Week with David Brinkley), an amphitheater with a mobile moderator (Phil Donahue Show). Some of these settings help solve the problem of multicandidate debates by avoiding the "chorus line" effect of a row of candidates lined up in front of a curtain.

If at all possible, check out the set before the debate, using stand-ins. Find out how things feel -- can the candidates see the time keepers and their warning cards, can they reach their water pitchers, does the lighting work? This can be done immediately before the debate (you can test the lighting and the house sound at the same time.) Even better, film the set with participants or stand-ins in place and review the tapes. A few minor adjustments before the last minute may make an enormous difference.

Audience

If you decide to have a large on-site audience, begin compiling an invitation list as soon as the debate site is chosen and the capacity of the hall is known. If you have the space, by all means invite the public and promote attendance. Distributing tickets or restricting attendance to the invited is a time-consuming process. However, you need to have some idea of the probable attendance and whether your hall will be embarrassingly empty or overflowing. You also want to make it difficult for a group to pack the hall with vocal supporters of a candidate or an issue position.

Although a debate is a service to the public and not generally used as a fundraiser, a small fee to cover some of your expenses and to motivate ticket-holders to attend is not unreasonable. If you have a "hit" on your hands, and expect an overwhelming response, work out some way to distribute tickets ahead of time. Your organization's leaders and anyone who worked on the debate should receive tickets. Cosponsors, candidates and broadcasters should be offered a limited number of tickets to distribute.

Send out announcements or invitations with order forms enclosed. State, either on the ticket itself or on a separate
page, when the doors will open and close and include audience instructions (e.g., no exit or entry during the debate, no partisan identification, no cameras, no applause, no obvious audience reactions to candidates, etc.). If you plan to have invited audience check in or pick up tickets at the site, make sure you have volunteer assistance and space for waiting in lines. Specify, in the invitation, when registration begins or tickets can be picked up.

You will need ushers to check tickets, seat the audience, and control the doors while the debate is in progress. Rope off any seats reserved for funders, candidates' staff and guests and other VIPs. Plan to make these seats available to others if they are not filled by the time the doors close. You can make the ushers' jobs easier by color-coding tickets for reserved seats.

For most debates, printed programs are used more for keepsakes than as aids for following the event. They provide a way to acknowledge funders and volunteers. Don't include information about the candidates in the program (except what office they are seeking and the most basic biographical information) without clearing the text with the candidates and giving each candidate an equal opportunity to submit copy.

Volunteers at the Site

With good training and oversight, volunteers can make a big difference in the success and ease of putting on a debate. Ask for volunteers to staff the information and press desks, collect tickets or check in the audience, act as escorts and greeters for candidates and other VIPs, usher, hand out programs, collect questions and evaluation forms from the audience, monitor the doors and act as timekeepers.

Ask each volunteer to fill out a questionnaire that includes times available, any special requirements (e.g., must have a seated job, needs transportation) and to rank several preferences from a list of tasks. Distinguish long-term tasks from one-shot deals. Assign alternates to some essential jobs, or designate "floaters" to take over as needed, but make sure that each volunteer has something significant to do and will be busy for most of the time on-duty. Let volunteers know that they will be reimbursed for such out-of-pocket expenses as parking, mileage, transportation, dependent care, etc.

Last Minute Briefings and Checklists

In the last few days before the debate, set aside time to meet with the principal participants in the debate, and go over arrangements in detail one last time while changes and adjustments are still possible. If you have access to the debate site, combine this briefing with a walk-through of the site and a run-through of the format. At minimum, send each major participant a debate schedule and specific instructions. Enclose a copy of any contracts, ground rules or written agreements. Follow the mailing with a phone call to answer questions and make sure there are no misunderstandings.

---- Broadcaster: The major broadcaster should have an opportunity to take a last-minute look at the site, set design and technical facilities. Staff needs to know when they can get into the site for equipment set up and the location of entrances and exits. If you are using a structured format, provide a minutes/seconds timetable -- a detailed schedule of the debates program.

---- News Media: Either send a news advisory to your media contacts or arrange to have a news briefing at the debate site. Provide the news media with minutes/seconds breakdowns of the format. Specify and explain guidelines and restrictions on the use of still and video cameras. Provide "backgrounders" that include any new last-minute decisions. Announce any pre- or post - debate opportunities to meet with candidate or other debate participants. Also, announce the availability of transcripts, videotapes or copies of the candidates’ closing remarks.

---- Volunteers: If possible, arrange time for orientation and a site walk-through. At a minimum, make sure someone is on hand to answer questions and adjust job assignments as needed. Provide volunteers with:

- Name tags.
- Tickets or credentials for entrance to the site.
- Locations and costs of parking; public transportation schedules.
- Exact times to report, where and to whom.
- Written instructions for task, time on duty.
- Detailed debate schedule.
- Clothing guidelines (e.g., no noisy jewelry in the debate room, standard identifying colors for ushers, comfortable shoes, etc.).
- List of names, address and phone numbers of debate staff and other volunteers (for car-pooling, etc.) and "floaters" and substitutes.
- Phone numbers for emergencies.
- Eating places or other facilities near the debate site.
- Expense vouchers and instructions for use.

---- Timekeepers: Timekeepers are a special category of volunteers. In recent debates, technology has replaced the traditional bells, whistles and cue cards and changed the role of the timekeeper. Work with your broadcaster on unobtrusive ways of alerting candidates to their time limits, such as lights on podiums out of sight of the audience.

If you do use volunteers, make sure they are well briefed and have some time to practice. Timekeepers should sit in on briefings with other debate participants. They should have copies of the ground rules and agreements with candidates and broadcasters, in addition to a minute/seconds debate schedule. The timekeepers should discuss methods and signals with the moderator, and jointly decide how to adjust the timing in case of unexpected follow-up questions, answers that do not take up the allotted time and other contingencies.

---- Moderators and/or Members of the Panel: Plan to meet with the moderator/panel at a last-minute briefing no earlier than the day before the debate. Review the format for the last time and hand out the schedule and the issues to be covered, along with any changes in ground rules or arrangements. Allow time for an abbreviated run-through of the debate segments and a rehearsal of introductory remarks, explanations of rules, etc. Panel members should decide the order in which they will ask questions. At this meeting, moderators, panel members, and the debate sponsor can discuss last-minute campaign issues, potential follow-up questions and anticipated problems.

---- Candidates: Arrange a brief session, on site, with the candidates or their stand-ins to check the podiums, chairs, stools or other furniture, the positioning of the other candidates, the moderator, panelists and timekeepers. Check out any signals the candidates must see. Use this opportunity for the broadcaster and house staff to do last-minute checks on light and sound. Review ground rules and timing for the last time. Brief the candidates on arrangements for still photographs and news conferences. This is the time for the draw or coin toss that determines the order in which the candidates speak.
CHAPTER 10
EVALUATION AND OTHER FOLLOW-UP

Once the debate is over, it is tempting to celebrate and then relax. But there are some follow-up tasks still to be done. Your evaluation and reports of the debate project will help your organization get the most out of the debate experience and provide a foundation for future debates.

Debate Follow-up

-- Thank Those Who Helped Consider a reception immediately after the debate (and any news conference) to share the credit for the accomplishment of a valuable and exciting public service. Invite all the participants and contributors. Volunteers and funders should get special attention, such as public recognition, a special party or certificates of appreciation.

Later, thank debate participants, volunteers and funders in writing and make sure they receive reports of the debate. A transcript, video or audio tape of the debate makes a nice remembrance. Or, present them with a kit of debate publications and materials or an album of debate photographs. You may be going to some of these same people for debate participation or assistance in the future, so establish a good long-term relationship.

-- Create a Record It will help future efforts if you collect and record as much as possible about the debate project. Arrange to have debate-related newspaper articles clipped and keep track of coverage in news weeklies or magazine. Videotape post-debate analyses and broadcast news coverage and try to capture radio coverage, talk show comments and radio interviews on audiotape.

-- Collect Materials Keep copies of all debate materials -- agreements, contracts, publications, timing schedules, tickets, programs, press clippings, tapes, photos, etc. -- that can be used as examples or prototypes for future debates. Your records on political debates may be of historic or academic interest. Consult with an appropriate library, university or archival institution. Don't pass on sensitive data about individuals or negotiations unless you can be assured that confidentiality will be protected.

Evaluating the Debate

The groundwork for evaluating your debate is laid during the planning process. As you identify debate goals, determine ways to measure progress toward those goals. Use several evaluation mechanisms, such as:

-- Questionnaires Ask everyone who worked on or participated in the debate to respond to a questionnaire about their experience and make suggestions for improvement. Distribute evaluation questionnaires to the on-site audience.

-- Interviews Schedule interviews with the principal participants and, if possible, representative members of the live and broadcast audience to get several prospectives on what worked and what could be improved.

-- Polling Get the results of any polling or focus groups conducted by the media. If you have the resources, commission a survey or add questions on debate viewing or reactions to the debate to an existing public opinion poll. Try to determine the demographic profile and voting intentions as well as the size of the debate audience. Measure public awareness of the debate as well as public opinion about it.

-- Ratings Consult your broadcaster for help in measuring the debate audience; or allocate funds for a rating service.

-- Review of Debate Tapes Invite people involved in the debate and outside experts (broadcast producers, journalists, academic specialists in political science or communications, etc.) to view tapes of the debate and provide constructive criticism. Use a standard questionnaire with room for comments.

-- Promotion Review Collect and evaluate all news articles, video and audio tapes of debate promotion and coverage. Estimate the size of the audience reached by promotion. Review the media strategy and suggest changes for future promotion efforts.
Reporting the Results

The results of the evaluation process will form the basis for a Final Report on the debate. This official report should include goals, plans, implementation techniques, results, evaluation and suggestions for the future. Other useful reports include:

-- Financial Report  A complete report of the actual income and expenditures along with the original budget, with explanations of any major changes or adjustments.

-- Summary Report  For distribution to the news media, candidates, broadcasters, etc. Includes the debate goals and how they were met, a brief chronology and an evaluation of the debate as a public service. Use photos to illustrate debate activities.

-- Report to Funders  Large funders, such as foundations, will let you know what their reporting requirements are. At a minimum, send funders a Summary Report and a Financial Report.
**Conclusion**

The League of Women Voters has learned that as practice and experience in sponsoring and producing debates, leads to debates that are better, easier and more informative for the public. A debate is a learning experience for the sponsor and the community. Candidates feel less at risk and, with experience, begin to see debates as opportunities and challenges more than risks. Candidates and broadcasters grow more willing to try new approaches and formats. Funders gain increasing appreciation for the audience appeal, visibility and public service provided by candidate debates.

Most important, the audience, the voters, come to expect candidate debates as an essential part of all major election campaigns. Citizens look to political debates for the information they need to make decisions on candidates and issues. Debate sponsors, broadcasters and candidates are making democracy work when they produce and participate in election-related debates.
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