



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF SKAGIT COUNTY

Policy Statement for League of Women Voters of Skagit County Candidates Forums

The League of Women Voters of Skagit County (LWVSkagit) is committed to providing a platform for non-partisan discussion and information sharing during Candidates Forums. These forums play a crucial role in facilitating democratic dialogue and enabling voters to make informed decisions.

The purpose of candidate forums is to educate voters about candidates' views on issues and to stimulate voter interest and participation in the election. LWVSkagit prefers to hold candidate forums, rather than candidate debates. There is no back-and-forth conversation or rebuttal between candidates in a LWVSkagit Forum.

To ensure fairness, transparency, and respectful engagement, the LWVSkagit has established the following expectations for forums:

1. Rigorously enforce the non-partisanship policy of the League

- The League of Women Voters shall not support nor oppose any political party or candidate. LWVSkagit will sponsor and conduct forums in such a way as to avoid creating the impression that the League favors one candidate over another.
- The League will communicate equitably with all eligible candidates about forum planning and procedures.

2. Follow all appropriate government regulations

- IRS rules apply to debates and forums sponsored by organizations designated as 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4). LWVSkagit is designated 501(c)(4) by the IRS. The LWVWA Education Fund is designated 501(c)(3). When using LWVWA Education Fund funds, the LWVSkagit must abide by the education fund rules.
- The League of Women Voters strictly adheres to the requirements of the FCC regarding use of recordings. Any use of the recording requires the approval of LWVSkagit with the caveat that it must be broadcast in its entirety. No candidate will be allowed to use or edit the footage for campaign purposes.

3. Include appropriate candidates in LWVSkagit forums

- Candidates must have an Election Status showing they will appear in the next election on the Washington Secretary of State's list of candidates.
- Write in candidates may be considered for inclusion under exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of LWVSkagit. Such candidate must have filed a declaration of candidacy form with the Washington Secretary of State's office.

4. Respectful Conduct

- Candidates must maintain a respectful and civil demeanor throughout the forum, treating fellow candidates, the forum's moderator, and audience members with courtesy.
- Personal attacks, derogatory language, or any form of discriminatory behavior will not be tolerated.

5. Time Management

- Candidates must adhere to the specified time limits for opening and/or closing statements, and responses to questions as outlined by the LWVSkagit and the forum's moderator.

- Interrupting or speaking out of turn will not be permitted, and candidates are expected to respect the speaking order established by the LWVSkagit.

6. Substance and Policy

- Candidates should focus on providing substantive information about their positions on relevant issues, their qualifications, and their plans if elected.
- Misleading or false statements will not be tolerated, and candidates are encouraged to fact-check their claims before presenting them.

7. Co-sponsorship of Forums

- If the forum is co-sponsored with another League of Women Voters group, and the other League takes the lead in conducting the forum, that League's forum rules will apply in the event of discrepancy between the organizations' policies.
- Co-sponsorships with non-League organizations are encouraged with the caveat that the mission and goals of the proposed co-sponsor are consistent with the League of Women Voters's. Any organization co-sponsoring a debate must meet the following conditions:
 - o Refrain from endorsing candidates or positions prior to or immediately after the forum.
 - o Agree to accept the League's standards of nonpartisanship and forum quality.
 - o Treat the candidates equitably.
 - o Agree to issue jointly all press releases, letters and other material circulated to the public.

8. Moderator Authority

- The LWVSkagit and the forum's moderator have the authority to enforce these policies and ensure a fair and productive forum.
- The forum's moderator may intervene if candidates fail to adhere to the boundaries outlined in this policy statement or engage in behavior that disrupts the forum's integrity.

9. Handling Empty Chair Candidate Forums

If only one candidate in a contested election accepts a forum invitation, or candidates cancel a forum appearance leaving only one participant, the result is called an "empty chair" forum. LWVSkagit prefers not to have an empty chair forum since the public loses an opportunity to compare candidates' views. However, should that situation arise, the following will apply:

- If feasible, LWVSkagit may combine related positions into one forum in an effort to minimize forums with a single candidate (e.g., combine Legislative District Positions 1 and 2 into a single forum).
- For local elections where there are multiple candidates but only one is attending the forum, the candidate attending will be welcome to participate.
- At the Leagues' discretion, in the event of a candidate's scheduling conflict, the LWVSkagit may allow those who are unable to attend to submit a brief opening statement (one and a half minutes) to be read by the moderator.
- For no-shows or cancellations, an announcement should be made during candidate introductions, without explanation of the reason(s), that the candidate is not participating.

By participating in the LWVSkagit's non-partisan Candidates Forums, candidates implicitly agree to abide by these boundaries and expectations. LWVSkagit reserves the right to take appropriate action, including but not limited to warning, restricting speaking time, or removing a candidate from the forum if these guidelines are violated.

The League of Women Voters of Skagit County is committed to upholding the principles of non-partisanship, democratic discourse, and informed decision-making. Through adherence to these boundaries, candidates can contribute to the overall success and integrity of the Candidates Forums.