



# Speed Dating With the Candidates Toolbox

## Table of Contents

Overview.....	2
Description .....	2
Goal and Objectives .....	2
Goal .....	2
Objectives .....	2
Activity Segments .....	2
Introduction.....	3
Description .....	3
Concepts .....	3
Number LWV Volunteers.....	3
Supplies & Equipment .....	3
Script for Introduction .....	4
Welcome.....	4
The Issues .....	4
Speed Dating for Politics .....	4
Example Format for Brief Summary of an Issue.....	5
Roundtable Discussion.....	5
Description .....	5
Concepts .....	5
Number LWV Volunteers.....	5
Supplies & Equipment .....	6
Suggestions for Managing Downtime, Tension, & Polarization.....	6
Conclusion.....	7
Description .....	7
Script for Conclusion .....	7
Comprehensive List of Volunteers, Supplies, & Equipment.....	8
Credits .....	8

# Overview

## Description

Speed dating for politics! A 1- to 2-hour discussion forum for voters and candidates in which small groups of voters gather for a brief roundtable discussion with individual candidates, one at a time. The candidates rotate from table to table at intervals of 10 minutes.

## Goal and Objectives

### Goal

Encourage informed and active participation in government by facilitating voter engagement.

### Objectives

1. Engage voters and their candidates for office through participation in roundtable discussions.
2. Increase voter knowledge of major campaign issues through a brief overview and facilitating candidate questions.

## Activity Segments

1. Introduction (15 minutes)
2. Roundtable discussions (10 minutes X number of candidates)
3. Conclusion (1 minute)



# Introduction

## Description

A 15-minute presentation in which the local League president (or designee) welcomes attendees, states the objectives of the forum, explains the League nonpartisan policy, and introduces candidates by name and office (5 minutes); the voters service chair (or a nonpartisan guest) outlines four to five major issues of the campaign with questions to be considered (8 minutes); and one facilitator explains the speed-dating roundtable discussion process (2 minutes).

## Concepts

- Welcome
- Nonpartisanship
- Political issues appropriate for the candidates
- Speed dating for politics

## Number LWV Volunteers

- Local League president or other League leader
- Local League voters service chair or a nonpartisan guest
- One facilitator

## Supplies & Equipment

### Printed Materials

- Sign-in sheets
- Nametags
  - Preprinted nametags for each candidate and volunteer
  - Blank nametags for attendees
- Programs (schedule of activities, qualifications for each office represented and names corresponding candidates, space for notes)
- Bookmarks (see template for local League at [www.lwvtexas.org/Vote\\_it\\_counts.html](http://www.lwvtexas.org/Vote_it_counts.html))
- Membership applications

### Supplies

- Pens for sign-in sheets
- Markers for nametags
- LWV banner for podium
- Light refreshments
- Paper plates, cups, and napkins

### Equipment

- 4' X 6' registration table with 2-3 chairs
- 4' X 6' display table where candidates can place campaign materials
- Round tables with chairs
  - One table per candidate
  - 6-10 chairs per table
- Podium for the leaders participating in the introduction
- Microphone at the podium (if needed for size of the room)

# Script for Introduction

## Welcome

Welcome! I'm \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ of the League of Women Voters of \_\_\_\_\_. The League is very glad that you are here. We hope that your participation in the roundtable discussions will achieve two objectives:

- Increase voter-candidate engagement in our community and
- Increase voter knowledge of candidate positions on the major issues facing voters in this election

Give and take between voters and candidates over the issues is exactly what our founders had in mind \_\_\_ years ago when the League was formed in 1920. We commend these candidates for running for office, for participating today, and being willing to tell us how they will improve our community through their public service.

As a reminder, the League is a **nonpartisan** political organization. We are nonpartisan in that we do not support or oppose candidates for office or political parties. We are **political** in that we advocate on issues after study and agreement among the members. Most important, we are dedicated to expanding public awareness about governmental issues.

The League of Women Voters is not for women only. We welcome your participation and support, whether male or female. And in fact, we have membership forms available should you wish to join us. And if you would like to support our nonpartisan education activities, we would welcome your tax-deductible donation to our Education Fund.

And now, I turn the meeting over to \_\_\_\_\_, our \_\_\_\_\_ who will provide an outline of the major issues at stake in this election.

## The Issues

We vote mainly because the officials we elect as voters make significant decisions that affect our lives—taxes, roads, minimum wage, teacher pay, social security, health care—you name it. And voters, you are here because you want to know more about the candidates' positions on issues pertinent to their office. Major issues facing candidates in this election include \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. Let's look at them one at a time.

– See example format on next page for brief description of each issue –

Now that you have an overview of these issues, \_\_\_\_\_, one of our facilitators will explain to you how you will be able to discuss them with each of the candidates.

## Speed Dating for Politics

As you can see, a candidate is seated at each table with a group of voters and one facilitator. After the candidates make a 1-minute introduction of why they are seeking the office, the facilitator will begin the discussion by asking one pertinent question. Following the candidate's response, those seated with the candidate will have the opportunity to ask questions. Each roundtable discussion will last 10 minutes, after which a bell will notify the candidates to move on to the table with the next higher number. Before we start, let me review the ground rules for our discussions.<sup>1</sup>

1. Let everyone have an opportunity to speak.
2. Don't interrupt unless for clarification or time keeping.
3. Listen carefully and respectfully; speak carefully and respectfully.
  - a. Be agreeable even when you disagree.
  - b. Accept that no viewpoint has a complete monopoly on the truth.
4. Share your personal experience when giving an example, not someone else's.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Civil Dialogue*, by United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012. Available at [www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/)

5. Avoid personal attacks, inflammatory rhetoric, gossip, and assigning motives to another person.
6. Remember that roundtable discussions are a dialogue, not a debate. Avoid being the know-it-all, convincer, or corrector.

So let's begin speed dating for politics!

### Example Format for Brief Summary of an Issue

Trans-Pecos Pipeline. The Trans-Pecos Pipeline is a 148 mile, 42" pipeline designed to carry natural gas from a hub outside Fort Stockton through Central West Texas ending at the Texas-Mexico border near Presidio. Texas-based Energy Transfer Partners is responsible for constructing and operating the pipeline.

Advocates for the pipeline argue that it will

- benefit air quality in the region by replacing Northern Mexico's polluting coal, diesel, and wood-burning fuel with clean-burning natural gas,
- create 350 construction and labor jobs,
- bring additional revenue to local communities from use of goods and services, and
- pay \$7.1 million in annual taxes to the three counties crossed by the pipeline

Opponents of the pipeline argue that it will

- damage the pristine nature of the Big Bend area, characterized by wide-open spaces and beautiful landscapes,
- run close to Big Ben National Park and the Chinati State Natural Area, harming their precious and diverse species of wildlife and flowers, and
- use eminent domain to seize private land if a satisfactory agreement isn't reached with an individual landowner.

The question at issue is "How would you balance the environmental concerns of Big Bend residents related to construction of the Trans-Pecos natural gas pipeline with oil and gas industry interests?"

## Roundtable Discussion

### Description

A 10-minute dialogue between one candidate and a small group of voters seated at a round table with a facilitator. At the end of each 10-minute segment, the candidate rotates to the next highest numbered table. The role of the facilitator:

- Set comfortable, welcoming tone.
  - Moderate the discussion without making content contributions.
  - Avoid sharing personal opinions or pushing own agenda.
  - Assist group in adhering to the ground rules.
- Process
  - Ask the candidate to begin the 1-minute self-introduction.
  - Begin the discussion with one predetermined, nonpartisan question to the candidate. Rotate questions for each segment.
  - Transition to voter questions; field questions fairly.
  - Monitor the time; end promptly after 10-minutes.

### Concepts

- Civic engagement among voters and candidates
- A secure, safe place for democracy in action

### Number LWV Volunteers

- One facilitator/moderator per table
- One timekeeper
- Photographer

## Supplies & Equipment

- Predetermined nonpartisan questions for facilitators to begin each segment of the roundtable discussion
- Mini pencils (3.5" presharpener; one per chair at each round table)
- Stop watch and timing signs

## Suggestions for Managing Downtime, Tension, & Polarization

### 1. Managing downtime

**Q:** What do I do when the discussion is at a standstill?

**A:** Go around the table for a comment from each participant, but allow participants to pass. Say something like, "We'd like to hear one comment or question from each person who wants to speak." (Adapted from Sheffert, p. 7)

### 2. Managing tension

**Q:** "What do I do when a participant says something that visibly heightens tension?" (p. 7)

**A:** Try the "Anyone Else?" approach. For example:

*Participant:* "I'm frustrated that all we've done is listen instead of asking questions!"

*Facilitator:* "Anyone else feeling frustrated?"

#### Rules for Asking, "Anyone Else?"

1. Listen for the intensity of feeling, and note what happens in the group. If anxiety rises, if you sense more tension in yourself, that could be a moment to ask an "Anyone else?" question. (Many statements require no response. The person making them is satisfied to get it out, and people accept the comment as part of the dialogue.)
2. Cite only the feeling behind the statement if the issue is potentially divisive. Find a subgroup for the emotion so that all emotions remain legitimate. (From Sheffert, p. 7)

### 3. Managing polarization

**Q:** "What do I do if people appear to become deeply polarized over conflicting beliefs, problem definitions, solutions, or decisions?" (Sheffert, p. 8)

**A:** Instead of trying to get participants back to the topic, find a way for them to listen and talk about the issue.

#### Rules for "Listen & Talk"

1. Stop the action.
2. Ask people to identify which subgroup they belong to.
3. Encourage the A's to talk with each other while the B's listen.
4. After all the A's have had their say, ask the B's to do the same while subgroup A listens.
5. Go back to action. Generally, people develop a more grounded sense of what they consider relevant. Also, they experience a continuum of opinions rather than two opposite poles. (From Sheffert, p. 8)

## Source of Suggestions for Managing Downtime, Tension, & Polarization

Adapted from *The Power of Civil Discourse: Creating Positive Programs and Forums in an Increasingly Uncivil World*, by D. R. Scheffert, May 2011, presented at 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual LWV Minnesota Convention. Available at

[www.lwvmn.org/sites/default/files/downloads/LWVMN%20Handout%20-%20Civil%20Discourse.pdf](http://www.lwvmn.org/sites/default/files/downloads/LWVMN%20Handout%20-%20Civil%20Discourse.pdf)

# Conclusion

## Description

A 1-minute wrap-up.

## Script for Conclusion

As we have listened and learned together, we have become informed voters. We thank these candidates for the time, effort, and sacrifice that it has taken to bring each to this point in their candidacies. Let's show our appreciation with a big round of applause!

The bookmark you received when you came in has websites for more information about voting. You'll find various deadlines, when you can vote, where to find voters guides, and an up-to-date list of documents that can be used if you don't have an acceptable photo ID. So please take a look.

Your vote counts-the only time your vote doesn't count is when you don't vote.

Thank you for coming and helping us Make Democracy Work!

# Comprehensive List of Volunteers, Supplies, & Equipment

Item	Registration Table	Introduction	Roundtable Discussion
<b>Volunteers</b>			
Host (president or designee)		1	
Voters service chair or guest		1	
Discussion facilitator		1	1 for each table
Registration volunteer staff	2-3		
Timekeeper			1
Photographer		1	
<b>Materials to be Printed</b>			
Bookmarks	1 per attendee		
Programs	1 per attendee		
Nametags–preprinted	1 per candidate & volunteer		
Nametags–blank	1 per attendee		
Sign-in sheets	5		
Membership applications	20		
Predetermined candidate questions for facilitators			1 set per facilitator
<b>Supplies</b>			
Markers for nametags	5		
Pens for sign-in sheets	5		
Mini pencils (3.5" presharpend)			1 box
LWV banner	1	1	
Light refreshments	Attendees		
Paper plates, cups, & napkins	Attendees		
<b>Equipment</b>			
4' X 6' table	2		
Round tables with chairs	1 table per candidate with 6-10 chairs each		
Podium		1	
Microphone at podium		1	
Stop watch and timing signs			1 set

## Credits

Meltzer, I., League of Women Voters of Kent, OH. (2016, June). *Alternative to candidate forums–Consider a speed dating format!* Presented at the LWVUS 52<sup>nd</sup> National Convention, Washington, DC.

Scott-Johnson, M. League of Women Voters of the Hill Country, TX. (2016, June). Notes. *Alternative to candidate forums–Consider a speed dating format!* [Presented at the LWVUS 52<sup>nd</sup> National Convention, Washington, DC.