

HOW TO PREPARE THE VOTERS GUIDE

The candidates are always listed in ballot order, with the party of the current governor first.

Ballot order is determined by drawing lots a few weeks before the election. Contact the Chief Clerk of the Voter Registration Office.

Letters to candidates should go out six or seven weeks before the election. The deadline for them to respond is a few days before the deadline for our fully compiled material to be sent to our contact at The Morning Call. The final ballot order is always known by that time.

Our contact will contact the appropriate person in the League about the publishing schedule. The guide is published in the paper on the Thursday two weeks before the election. It should be on our website soon after all the information is compiled.

It's essential to contact the Voters Guide Chair of the Northampton County LWV in state/federal election years because we share several districts. They manage some races, and we manage others.

Preparing the ballot for the state/federal years is easy. We include all legislative positions (in ballot order). It can be difficult to find the names and addresses of the candidates if you do this too early, as they file in Harrisburg. The Pennsylvania Department of State site is where to find much of the information, or contact LWVPA and ask them to send it to you. Check again after August 1, the deadline for independent candidates to file.

Preparing the ballot for municipal elections is a bit tricky and may be difficult for someone not familiar with local government in Lehigh County. We include candidates for decision-making positions, such as executive, commissioner, council member, supervisor, school director. Many candidates run for non-legislative and non-executive positions, so we have to sift through the databases to find the ones we are including in the guide. (It's not really that hard if you have some background in local government.) We contact only those who are in contested races for information, but we include the names of all of them (in ballot order) in the guide. This often differs in the primary and the general elections.

To find the names of all the candidates who have filed in a municipal election, with their addresses, contact the chief clerk at the voter registration office. The office will send two Excel files, one for Democratic candidates and one for Republican candidates. Candidates for school director and district magistrate are

allowed to crossfile so may appear on both lists. You need to check carefully to find the contested races. Also, you have to check after the deadline for candidates to either withdraw or be removed from the ballot because their candidacy was successfully challenged, and again after August 1 so you can find candidates from non-official parties who will be on the fall ballot.

In state/federal and municipal elections, insert the municipality (very often different from the mailing address) after the name of the candidate.

For all general elections, offer the candidates to use the same response they have used for the guide in the primary election. Sometimes they want a few words changed. Mostly they don't want any changes so you just copy and paste their primary information into a new file for the general election.

Ask Tim Benyo to send you any ballot questions. They have to be approved by the county's election commissioners, so are not usually available early.

SENDING QUESTIONNAIRES TO CANDIDATES

Candidates need their questionnaire sent on LWVLC stationery, in our envelopes. This way they cannot easily claim the information didn't come.

The mailing includes a letter explaining the voters guide and giving the deadlines. The questionnaire is sent with the letter. This needs to be slightly modified for each election. In municipal elections, candidates for district judge are asked a different question than the candidates for municipal and school boards

We have successfully asked for the questionnaire to be returned to us by email in the past few years. A notice, with links to all the documents a candidate needs to download, has to go on the website a day or so before the letters are sent. In the letter you send, **make sure you highlight the URL of the new website** and if possible provide a direct link to the section for candidates.

Use the our local league's email address unless you establish a new one. If you decide to use a new email address, make it a webmail address and be sure to give the name and password to at least two other LWV members. Do not ask candidates to respond to your personal email address.

You may have to rename some emails if a candidate doesn't do that. Each response must be able to be identified easily by the name of the candidate. Move each response as you receive it into a folder you create that is named for the year and election (e.g. 2018-FALL).

The questionnaire for municipal and school board candidates is pretty much the same every odd-numbered year. The question itself is very generic. However, all dates and directions for responding need to be checked and rechecked. The fall questionnaire should contain this above the question: "You may ask us to reuse the response you sent before the Primary Election, or you may edit that response if you wish. Look on our website for the Voters Guide from the Primary Election if you have not retained a copy."

The letter sent with the questionnaire also needs to be updated every year, but the basic information

remains the same.

I have more samples of letters and questionnaires than you really want to see, so I'll provide only a few.

About the paper questionnaire that is mailed with the letter: you have to include in the instructions the word counts for the response and biographical fields similar to the word counts set forth by the newspaper or whatever printed form you develop.

Even though the word limits appear on the paper questionnaire, candidates often do not heed them. League volunteers have to "truncate" the answers, literally cut them off at 50 or 75 words; we cannot edit answers. We send the remaining information to the newspaper.

An example of our 2019 paper questionnaire may be found on our website.