

# Sips & Civility Event Preparation Guide

By LWV San Diego

## Background

The Sips & Civility event series is designed to encourage civil political discussion, especially among younger and traditionally politically under-engaged citizens. Events feature a networking reception, guest keynote speaker, and about an hour of discussion at group tables. These events differ from other League events in a couple of ways: we provide a casual after-work atmosphere with beer, wine, and snacks; we encourage participants to take ideas from our speaker and expand upon them in their conversations. ***We don't expect attendees to become experts in the night's topic; we aim to inspire them to learn more, spread the joy of civil political conversation, and ultimately participate in the democratic process.***

## Planning

1. **Location, location location** - One of the draws for our event is that it's held at a beautiful location at the top floor of our new downtown central library. You can find a great event space too! We like our space because it has great AV equipment and plenty of room for us to have up to 15 round tables for discussion groups. You may want to start in a smaller venue - we did, and grew into filling such a large space. If you plan to have alcoholic beverages available, make sure the venue allows it. If you are hosting at a venue that does not currently have a liquor license, you will need to acquire an event liquor license. We purchase one through the ***Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC)*** office every time for \$50. Alternatively, you may decide to have your event at a local bar or restaurant that offers a meeting area. This could be a great way to score a free venue. Just keep in mind that you will want some sort of room that is sectioned off for only your attendees to keep outside noise limited.
2. **Program** - Finding an engaging speaker is key! League members can sometimes be real government policy wonks and like to hear a lot of detail from a speaker. When searching for someone, remember that you are trying to engage people who may not even be used to discussing politics. Find a speaker who is dynamic, energetic, but also is able to abide by the League's nonpartisan policy. We recommend that you find a great speaker first, and build your discussion topics around what she/he brings to the table. ***Your keynote speaker should provide an anchor for the night's conversation*** - she or he is an expert who shares facts upon which the rest of the group's discussion is based.
3. **Advertising** - To engage younger people who aren't current League members you can promote your events on Social Media; specifically Facebook and Meetup.com. In order to have about 125 people attend, we spent \$200 on targeted Facebook ads. To do this, you must have a Facebook place page and business account. Create an event on your Facebook page, and then create ads specific to gaining event responses. Play around with different age group and interest targets to see which works best.

You will get the most responses in the week leading up to your event. We recommend spending some money on the event when you first post it, and then the bulk of the advertising budget in the week leading up to the event. It's also a good idea to post a couple of teaser images/posts on the event page itself in the week prior to the event. **You should also leverage past attendees.** We keep an email list of everyone who has previously attended. Right after the event, email with a link to the event pictures posted on Facebook. Then, email to them a couple of times prior to the next event encouraging them to RSVP.

4. **Logistics** - Like any event, planning ahead is going to make your event night much smoother. In addition to this guide, LWVSD has put together a **Sips & Civility Starter Kit** which includes a Planning Tool workbook, sample Discussion Leader Guide, and sample print materials. The key components of the Planning tool are 1) a list of items to bring on the night of the event, 2) list of volunteers, positions, discussion leaders, and table assignments, 3) program, including keynote speaker information and discussion questions. You should have the entire planning tool filled out at least 2 weeks prior to your event. **One to two weeks before the event**, send out the discussion leader guide to all of your discussion leaders and find out if they have any questions about the topic at hand or the event logistics. You will also want to include your keynote speaker so she/he has the same information.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **Q. Do you check people's IDs to see if they are old enough to drink?**

- A. Absolutely! You can purchase wristbands for very little cost on Amazon. Have one of your sign-in table volunteers print out one or two small cheat sheets that shows the date someone must be born prior to be 21 the day of your event. Check everyone's ID at sign-in and give each a wristband if she/he is allowed to drink alcohol.

#### **Q. How do you get free beer donated to your event?**

- A. Many breweries are happy to make a donation to your cause. Larger breweries that are very popular are asked for donations all of the time, so they may be less willing to give, especially to what is perceived as a "political" event. Try reaching out to smaller breweries who need the publicity, and make sure you start contacting them several months in advance of your event.

#### **Q. Do people have to reserve tickets to attend the event?**

- A. We ask that our attendees RSVP via Facebook so that we have some idea of how many people will attend. However, we do not collect tickets or check their RSVP at the door. Our event is free and open to the public.

#### **Q. Do you pay for the event space?**

- A. Because we have been hosting the event at a local library and because the event is free and open to the public and aligns with the library's programming goals, we do not pay a fee. Once you find an event

space that fits your budget, ask to book out several events for the rest of the year so that you can lock in the good deal.

**Q. How do you choose what topics to discuss?**

A. The idea behind Sips & Civility was to capitalize off of all the great work the League has already done, but to share our knowledge with a demographic that the League doesn't always reach. We try to select topics that our League members already know about, so that they can volunteer as confident discussion leaders. We also want to make sure the topics are engaging to our target demographic; we ask for topic suggestions on each exit survey to help guide our selection for the next events.

**Q. How do you get conversation going?**

A. Our discussion leaders are given several discussion questions in advance of the event. These are open-ended questions that don't have a right or wrong answer. If there is a lull in conversation, leaders can simply turn to the next question to keep things going. Often, we have trouble stopping the great conversations that are going on!

**Q. How do you keep things civil when you're discussing hot topics like Immigration and Fake News?**

A. At every event we announce the discussion etiquette and it is printed on every program. These were actually borrowed from a partner organization (Independent Voter Project): No Personal Attacks, No Partisan Attacks, No Self-Promotion, Substantiate Claims.

Interested in running your own Sips & Civility? Please feel free to reach out with any questions!

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