

How Elected Officials in SLO County Promote Civil Discourse

On October 24, 2013, the League of Women Voters of San Luis Obispo County **sent letters to 39** incumbent elected officials of the seven cities and San Luis Obispo County to solicit their responses on how they **promote civil discourse** in their governmental bodies. Below is a very brief summary of response highlights that were universal and/or unique. The full report will be available online.

- **Arroyo Grande** emphasizes the importance of the Presiding Official “thanking” each speaker.
- **Atascadero** provides training for conducting meetings and interacting with the public, including the use of electronic technology.
- **Grover Beach** emphasizes respectful listening, the use of facts, careful use of non-verbal reactions, and has adopted detailed civil discourse procedures: it has a strict Code of Ethics and enforcement procedure.
- **Morro Bay** has adopted several resolutions regarding policy and procedures for meetings and methods for enforcement.
- **Paso Robles** has adopted a Code of Ethics and emphasizes rule-enforcement.
- **Pismo Beach** has published a Handbook detailing their policies and procedures: violation is a misdemeanor offense.
- **City of San Luis Obispo** has adopted Rules of Procedure agreed upon by council and commissioners. In 2011, the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified best practices that focus on respect, understanding, careful word choice, truth seeking, humility, and service.
- **The San Luis Obispo County Election Officials’ Civility Accord** was adopted June 6th, 2013: it emphasizes openness, responsibility, professionalism, and the aim of debate as betterment, not destruction.

While it is evident from our field research that our local officials strive to promote Civil Discourse with each other, their staff, and citizens, they told us that they welcome suggestions from the LWV of SLO County on ways to improve Civil Discourse in local government. **Mayor Tom O’Malley** has already invited the LWV of SLO County to present our findings on Civil Discourse to the 1st fall **Meeting of the Mayors to be held in Atascadero**. After our year-long study on Civil Discourse, we realized that by updating our Government position to include Civil Discourse and by adding Strategic Goal #5 to emphasize the promotion of Civil Discourse, we would finally be in a position to educate, train, and advocate on behalf of Civil Discourse in local government.