

How to Organize a Candidates Forum

Three - five weeks prior to the forum

Find/organize volunteers

- Who will take the lead and be the contact person?
- Who will assist (with set up, with refreshments, with communications, with clean up)?
- Who will act as emcee?

Pick a date and time, select a venue

- Determine well in advance of event – candidates’ calendars fill up quickly
- Make sure the date doesn’t coincide with other important school or community events
- Choose more than one date – a preferred and a couple of optional – you may find you have to adjust depending on candidate availability
- Select a venue. Determine if the forum will be in-person (school gym, library or community hall) or if a virtual venue is preferred (Zoom, Teams, Google Meets). Whichever you choose, ensure the meeting ‘space’ is appropriate for your event, and that you have adequate volunteers to help run it smoothly.
- Time is important – what is a reasonable amount of time for the event (including travel time if in-person); determine start and end time of event

Invite candidates and confirm their attendance

- Call each candidate headquarters to make sure they are available on that date
- Send details to candidate headquarters with date, times, location, directions, etc.
- Provide the candidates with a contact person name, email, phone number
- Send a formal written confirmation once the details and logistics have been confirmed. Include the virtual meeting link, if required, and a note indicating if the forum will be recorded and how the recording will be used.

Book the venue

If hosting an in-person event:

- Confirm the venue booking
- Confirm seating and other items required are available (audience chairs, head table for candidates, podium, microphones for head table, podium and audience floor mics - additional table for refreshments)

If hosting a virtual event:

- Set up the virtual meeting on the chosen platform; required registration to attend is recommended
- Assign a skilled ‘virtual meeting moderator’ and schedule ‘practice sessions’ to ensure a smooth process for the forum
- Decide if the event will be recorded, and if so, how will the recording be used. Ensure all candidates are informed of this when invited.

Two - four weeks out

Develop the agenda

- Confirm all candidates’ attendance
- Develop forum agenda - how will your evening unfold? How will it end?



- What opportunities would you like your audience to have? (formal question period, informal mix and mingle?)

Prepare the Emcee

- Develop emcee speaking notes, provide candidate names with phonetic pronunciation
- Offer to do a dry run with the emcee – go through the events’ “flow” using the agenda
- Make sure there is a back-up emcee (in case of an unforeseen event)

One - three weeks out, and repeated until the event

Advertise, advertise, advertise

- You cannot overdo this – posters, Facebook, Twitter, flyers, public service announcements on the radio closer to the event, phone calls – use every tactic you know to get the word out
- Contact candidates’ headquarters – everyone still a go? Need anything, such as directions to the venue? Or a practice run on the virtual platform?
- Contact local media – encourage attendance

Week of the forum

Check, check and re-check

- Venue is ready?
- Volunteers are prepped and know what is expected of them? (Emcee has speaking notes, knows the names of each candidate, and is prepared to moderate the questions. Coffee and donut person is on deck, etc.)
- Everyone knows what time to arrive and what their role is

Day of forum

Set the tone

- Arrive early - with plenty of time to set up venue, if in-person, or test/be comfortable with the virtual platform
- Check sound system, or camera/microphone/chat settings
- Greet candidates and people arriving – it’s always nice to be welcomed
- If the forum is in-person, encourage people to mix and mingle, while observing health protocols
- If the forum is held virtually, encourage people to use the chat function to “mix and mingle”
- Start on time, stick to the agenda and end on time
- Make sure the in-person venue is left clean and tidy

A few days after the forum

- Thank the candidates for their participation
- Thank all volunteers, publicly and privately
- Post media links to articles about the forum, and to a recording if it is available to the public
- Congratulate your school council for being actively involved!

