

How to Organize a Candidates' Forum

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 the venue and check to make sure it is available for that date and time (school gym, library or community hall – make sure the space is appropriate for your event)
- ✓ Time is important – what is a reasonable amount of time for the event (including travel time); 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

Book the venue

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

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?)

Organize a Candidates' Forum



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 evening’s “flow” using the agenda
- ✓ Make sure there’s a back-up emcee in case of an unforeseen event

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 evening, 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?
- ✓ Contact local media – encourage attendance

Week of the forum

Check, check and recheck

- ✓ 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

Night of forum

Set the tone

- ✓ Arrive in plenty of time to set up venue
- ✓ Check sound system
- ✓ Greet candidates and people arriving – it’s always nice to be welcomed
- ✓ Encourage people to mix and mingle – candidates love any opportunity to speak with potential voters!
- ✓ Start on time, stick to the agenda and end on time
- ✓ Make sure the 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
- ✓ Congratulate your school council for being actively involved!

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Candidates' Forum Checklist

Five weeks prior to the forum

Volunteers in place:

- Lead and contact person selected
- Volunteers in place for set up, refreshments, communications, clean up
- Emcee selected
- Date, time and forum venue selected and confirmed
- Seating and other things required are available (audience chairs, head table for candidates, podium, microphones – for head table, podium and audience floor mics - long table for refreshments)
- Details of forum sent to candidate headquarters (including contact person info)
- Formal written invitation sent

Four weeks out

- candidates confirmed
- Forum agenda developed
- Emcee prepared with speaking notes

Three weeks out, and repeated until the event

- Advertising underway
- Candidates' headquarters contacted to re-confirm and remind
- Local media contacted and aware of forum information

Week of the forum

- Check to confirm venue is ready
- Volunteers are prepped and know what is expected of them

Night of forum

- Venue is ready
- Sound system ready
- Refreshments are ready
- Venue is left in an appropriate condition after the forum

A few days after the forum

- Thank you notes sent to the candidates
- Thank you notes sent to all volunteers
- Media links to forum articles available

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