GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATES MEETINGS

The following guidelines are for meetings where all the candidates for an office can be questioned by the public. When hosting a candidates meeting, it is the responsibility of person/group that is conducting the meeting to provide an unbiased forum that will be informative for the voters, fair to each candidate and pleasant for everyone. All candidates for an office (whether of major or minor parties or independent) should be treated alike. If some decide not to come, you may go ahead with the meeting. Be sure to tell the audience that all candidates were invited to participate.

PLANNING

1. Decide what format will best serve the community for this particular election. Consider: how many candidates are running? Are there any "hot" issues? Will citizens gain more by shaking a candidate's hand or by listening to the candidate speak? (see *Selecting a Format* and *Types of Formats*)
2. Before setting a date, check the calendar of coming events in the community. Clear the date with the political parties.
3. Consider involving other individuals and organizations: PTA, civic groups, etc. This will add to audience size and community interest. Co-sponsors may wish to be in on the planning, but it should be understood that the policies of nonpartisanship will prevail.
4. Plan for adequate publicity: posters, church and PTA bulletins, public service announcements, newspapers. Also invite community organizations and school government classes.

Rules: The rules you set are to ensure absolute fairness for everyone. A time keeper is a good idea. Decide whether to allow or prohibit substitute speakers if a candidate can not attend. (see *Suggested Candidates Meeting Rules)*

Invitations: Extend a *written* invitation to all the candidates for the office. Mention the co-sponsors, if any, the purpose of the meeting and the format. Enclose a schedule of the meeting and a list of the ground rules with the letter of invitation.

Format: You may draw up a list of questions ahead of time to get the meeting started or you may decide that each candidate is allotted a specific time period to speak on: (1) a specific issue, or (2) whatever topic/issue they want. (see *Types of Formats*)

Questions: Decide if questions from the audience should be asked as the meeting goes on, or if questions should be held for a Question and Answer period after all the candidates have spoken. Also decide if members of the audience may ask their questions directly or if questions should be written down and asked by the moderator. (see *How to Organize a Candidates Meeting*)

<u>Moderator</u>: In choosing a moderator, consider: stage presence, political neutrality, tact and a sense of fair play, ability to make quick decisions, reasonable sense of humor, gracious manner while being firm. It is advisable to ask someone outside the immediate community to act as moderator.

The moderator:
• Involves all candidates in the discussion.
• Enforces the ground rules and format during the meeting and may interrupt
   candidates to carry this out.
• Needs a knowledge of the issues, especially any touchy questions that might arise.
• Is not responsible for timing the candidates responses or screening the questions.

The moderator should open the meeting with a few statements about the format of the meeting. Then give a description of the office for which the candidates are running: title, term of office, qualifications and duties or functions of the office. All the candidates may be introduced at this point. Candidates are introduced by full name and title if any, the first time. Thereafter, they should be referred to as "Mr. (name)" "Mrs. (name)" "Ms. (name)" "Dr. (name)" etc. A brief biographical sketch of each candidate may be included with the introduction, as long as all the biographical sketches are handled in a fair and even-handed manner.

<u>Meeting</u>: Start on time. The length of the meeting will vary with the number of candidates but two hours is about maximum. Decide on the order that candidates will speak. - alphabetical order, reverse alphabetical order, or drawn by lot immediately prior to the meeting, etc.

Each candidate may be asked to give an opening statement about what they expect to accomplish in the office sought or about a specific topic/question. Set a time limit for these statements.

Enforce time limits by having a time keeper with a stop watch. The timekeeper should have signs "30 seconds left" and "Stop" to hold up for the candidate to see at the appropriate times. A bell or whistle can be used to indicate time is up.

An informal coffee hour after the meeting allows the candidates to mingle with the audience and answer additional questions.

See *Candidate s Meeting "To Do List"*

HOW TO ORGANIZE A CANDIDATES MEETING

1. Recruit volunteers. Have a meeting immediately and make the decisions in #2, #3, #4 and #5 before sending invitations to the candidates. Assign responsibilities.

2. Select site. Handicap access and parking should be a consideration.

3. Choose format. (See *Selecting a Format* and *Types of Format*)
    a. If a question and answer format is chosen, decisions must be made about length of candidates opening and closing statements and length of answers. Volunteers will be needed to act as timers. A stopwatch or other effective timing device is needed. It is helpful to candidates to hold up signs indicating remaining time such as "30!seconds" and "Stop" when time is up.
    b. If the crosstalk format is chosen, it will be necessary to meet with the moderator and be sure all involved understand the process. Decide if questions will be taken from the audience, and if so, how they will be handled. In a controversial atmosphere, it usually works best to supply pencils and cards for written questions that are collected, screened for duplicates by volunteers and handed to the moderator. Decide if the candidates will make opening and closing statements.

4. Decide if the program will be videotaped. Cable access is available to many communities and is a good way to get larger exposure for your program. Call the company that services your community. Make arrangements early. It may be necessary to hold the meeting at the cable access television studio if they do not have mobile equipment to take to another site.

5. Decide if questions should be asked of the candidates as the meeting goes on, or if questions should be held for a Question and Answer period after all candidates have spoken. Also decide if members of the audience may ask their questions directly or if questions should be written down and asked by the moderator.
    a. When the committee decides to use written questions from the audience, the questions should be quickly reviewed to see that they are pertinent to the discussion, are not repetitious and do not include personal attacks. Usually two people are needed to review the questions and at least two people are needed to collect questions from the audience and hand out pencils and paper if needed. Selected questions are passed on to the moderator to pose.
    b. When questions are asked directly by audience members, the moderator is responsible for recognizing the questioner and seeing that the procedure is fair to both the audience and candidates.

6. Send letters of invitation to all candidates for the same office at the same time.
    a. All candidates must be treated equally.
    b. Notify candidates of ground rules, schedule, format, directions to site and arrangements at site.
    c. Advise candidates if you are videotaping the program and give appropriate instructions for appearing on television.

7. Select moderator. Moderator must be someone who is not identified with any political party or does not have any connection with the candidates in the debate It is usually desirable to select someone from another community.
   a. Send moderator copies of all information relevant to the program: a detailed time schedule, meeting format and the rules governing the meeting.
   b. Give the moderator the candidates' names and help with name's pronunciation if unusual. Provide the biographical information that will be used in the introductions if you decide to do this.
   c. Advise the moderator about any controversial issues.

8. Decide on arrangements at site: podium for speakers, seating arrangement - on a stage or at floor level, seating for the audience, etc. Determine need for microphones. In a large room it is better for the moderator and each candidate to have their own microphone, but they can share when necessary. All arrangements hinge on whether you decide to videotape the program. If the meeting is at a television studio many of these considerations are decided by the facilities available at the studio.

9. Candidates should have name tags and large name cards in front of them if an audience is present. If televising the meeting with limited or no audience, name tags and name cards are not as necessary and may be distracting to the television viewer. The candidates are identified with their names on the screen.

10. Make plans for advertising the event: posters, newsletters, newspapers, etc.

11. Have volunteers available to greet the candidates and advise them of arrangements.

12. Reconfirm all details.

13. Confirm candidates' attendance if you did not require a signed acceptance with the invitation. Always double check with candidates who have not responded.

AFTER THE MEETING

1. Have an evaluation meeting with the volunteers. Ask moderator for evaluation suggestions.

2. Send thank you letters to all participants and volunteers.

See *Candidate s Meeting "To Do" Check List*

SUGGESTED CANDIDATES MEETING RULES

1. Substitutes or stand-ins for the candidate (will be/will not be) allowed.

2. To preserve a non-partisan atmosphere during the (forum/meeting), no campaign banners, signs or other campaign paraphernalia will be allowed, including on the candidates person.

3. Campaign literature may be placed on the designated table (before/after) the meeting in the (back of the room/side of the room, etc.).

4. Candidates should arrive 15 minutes before their scheduled appearance to attend to last minute details such as review of the format and for microphone instructions or adjustments.

5. A moderator will conduct the meeting and has the responsibility to interrupt the proceedings to enforce the ground rules and format.

6. Time limits are as follows:
    (Make a list of the time limits as decided by the committee and enter the information here.) A timekeeper will keep track of the time allotted to candidates as they speak and/or respond. The timekeeper will hold up signs "30 seconds left" and "Stop" at the appropriate times. A bell or whistle will used to indicate time is up.

7. Questions from the audience (will be/will not be) screened. They will be asked by (the moderator/directly from the audience).

Remember the rules you set are to ensure absolute fairness for everyone.

Other rules may be added to this list as needed.

CANDIDATES MEETING "TO DO" CHECK LIST

BEFORE THE MEETING

✔ Select the site. Handicap access and parking should be a consideration.

✔ Recruit volunteers.

✔ Decide ground rules, schedule and format.

✔ Decide on videotaping program - cable access is available in many communities. Candidates may have to sign a release form if meeting is televised. Check with those doing the taping and get a sample form from them.

✔ Send letters of invitation to candidates. Include information about ground rules, schedule, format and videotaping. (see *Sample Letters)*

✔ Select moderator. Send letter with instructions. (see *Sample Letters)*

✔ Decide on arrangements at site: Candidates will go to a podium to speak or speak from where they are seated; Candidates' seating will be on a stage or on floor; Location for timekeeper; Seating for audience (how many, etc.). Should a place be provided for candidates to meet with members of the audience after the meeting?

✔ Determine need for microphones - ideal for the moderator and each candidate to have one, but can share. When possible, floor mikes should be used if members of the audience will be asking questions from the floor.

✔ Make plans for advertising the event - posters, newsletters, newspapers.

✔ Confirm candidates attendance. Contact those who haven't replied.

✔ Prepare supplies for the meeting:
Name holders to be placed in front of each candidate - these should be easily seen by the audience
Name tags for candidates, moderator, timekeeper and volunteers
Signs and stopwatch for timekeeper
Skirting for candidates table
Paper and pencils for audience and candidates use

DAY OF THE MEETING

✔ Check microphones, lighting and room temperature prior to the meeting.

✔ Set up table for candidates with their name holders — include paper, pencil/pen at each place and provide water and water glasses. Set up a separate table for the timekeeper and those who will be screening questions (if there will be written questions). The moderator may be placed at either the candidates' or timekeeper's table.

✔ Set up a table for candidates literature, preferably at the back of the room.

✔ Check that there are extra chairs in case the audience is larger than expected and that coat racks are available.

AT THE MEETING

✔ Have volunteers available to greet the candidates at the door. The volunteers should show the candidates to their assigned place and tell them where they can put their campaign literature. Volunteers need to be informed about the meeting's format so that they can answer questions the candidates may have about the arrangements.

✔ Chair should greet moderator and answer questions moderator may have and go over any changes that have may been made.

✔ During the meeting volunteers should be on either side of the room to assist the audience when asking questions:
— Handing out paper and pencils and taking written questions to the screeners OR
— Manning the floor mike if questions will be asked directly from the audience.

AFTER THE MEETING

✔ Send thank you letters to all participants and volunteers.

✔ Hold an evaluation meeting and prepare a report for future use.

SELECTING A FORMAT FOR A CANDIDATES MEETING

In designing a candidates meeting format, it is desirable to provide for spontaneous interaction between candidates.

QUESTION-AND-ANSWER WITH TIMED RESPONSES

This format, with its variations, is the most commonly used for candidate debates. Under this format, questions may be asked by a panel or by a moderator. Questions may be selected in advance or the moderator/panel may have the discretion to originate questions either within certain issue areas, within guidelines or with no limits. The candidate's response is timed - 30 sec, or 1 min., etc.

LOOSE QUESTION-AND-ANSWER/CROSSTALK FORMAT

In this format, the moderator poses a question and guides the candidates in a discussion that can include candidate questions responses, rebuttals and follow-up questions with no firm time limits. The moderator is responsible for seeing that each candidate has an equal opportunity to respond to questions.

A crosstalk format requires a moderator who is strong enough to keep control and skilled enough to keep the discussion moving and on track. At the same time, the moderator must make sure that each candidate gets an equal opportunity to address each issue. To work well, this kind of format also requires articulate, astute and confident candidates. Optimally, an open format makes it possible to continue a good informative discussion or curtail discussion that is repetitive and nonproductive.

In a crosstalk format, the moderator can probe for definitive answers, redirect questions to other candidates or ask for short responses followed by explanations. An alert moderator can explore issues as they come up in the discussion. Candidates have the opportunity to explain their positions, put each other on the spot or respond immediately to opponents' charges. With articulate candidates, interesting issues and a good moderator the result is a lively, fast-moving debate, especially effective on television.

The crosstalk format has risks as well as advantages for everyone involved. The candidates may take control of the debate, leaving important issues unaddressed. The debate may degenerate into an exchange of charges and countercharges. One or another of the candidates may dominate the debate or end up being bullied. Ground rules are especially important in controlling this type of format. The candidates must accept the moderator's ability to break into a discussion or to redirect the questioning. Candidates should not be able to change the subject unilaterally or introduce extra issues.

TYPES OF FORMATS

The following is a look at some tried and true formats and how they work

TRADITIONAL OR FORMAL

This is the kind of debate encountered in high school and college debating competitions. It begins with a "proposition," a statement of opinion on an issue. Each candidate addresses the proposition in an opening statement; each candidate then has an opportunity to rebut or respond to the statement. *See Table 1.*

Table 1: Traditional or Formal

Proposition is read 2 minutes

Opening statement -
Candidate A   4 minutes

Opening statement -
Candidate B   4 minutes

Rebuttal -
Candidate A   1 minute

Rebuttal -
Candidate B   1 minute

(Counter rebuttals are an option)

Closing statement -
Candidate A   2 minutes

Closing Statement -
Candidate B   2 minutes

This format limits the number of topics that can be addressed and forces

candidates into a pro or con stance, leaving little room for agreements or gradations of opinion. While not generally used for candidate debates, this format can be effective for one segment of a longer debate, focusing the discussion on a topic on which the candidates hold sharply differing views. The rebuttal has become part of many other debate formats.

Variations

❏ Candidates each submit several propositions in advance; the sponsor chooses one from each candidate.

❏ After the opening statements and rebuttals, the candidates question each other (a format developed at the University of Oregon).

QUESTION-AND-ANSWER WITH TIMED RESPONSES

This "classic" debate formula is perhaps the most familiar. A moderator or panelist addresses a question to a candidate and the candidate has a set time to respond. Sometimes each candidate is expected to answer each question. *See Table 2.*

Table 2: Question-and-Answer with Timed Response

Question #1 to Candidate A	30 seconds
Candidate A responds	2 minutes
Question #1 to Candidate B rephrased	30 seconds
Candidate B responds	2 minutes
Candidate C responds	2 minutes

Sometimes each candidate gets a different question. *See Table 3.*

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│  Table 3:  Question-and-Answer          │
│  with Timed Response                    │
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│  Question #1 to                         │
│  Candidate A           30 seconds       │
│                                         │
│  Candidate A responds  2 minutes        │
│                                         │
│  Question #2 to                         │
│  Candidate B           30 seconds       │
│                                         │
│  Candidate B responds  2 minutes        │
│                                         │
│  Question #3 to                         │
│  Candidate C           30 seconds       │
│                                         │
│  Candidate C responds  2 minutes        │
│                                         │
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Candidates like this format because it is relatively predictable and resembles a news conference. Incumbents, particularly, are practiced at anticipating questions and come prepared with answers. The exact timing makes it easy to fit the debate into a broadcast time-slot. However, it offers little or no opportunity for candidates to respond to each other. It tends to be fragmented, jumping from one issue to another with little continuity and even less depth. Its predictability and repetition make it tedious to watch.

Variations
Using one or more of these variations will improve the classic debate format:

❑ **Rebuttals** give candidates the opportunity to give a timed response to an opponent's answer.

❑ **Follow-up questions** allow the moderator or panelist to ask related follow-up questions to probe for more in-depth answers or non-evasive responses.

❑ **Candidate follow-up questions** provide an opportunity for candidates to ask opponents questions that are directly related to the opponent's response.

❑ **"Jump ball" questions** are an especially useful technique in multi-candidate debates. The moderator, or panelist, poses a question and each candidate has the opportunity to respond. Candidates may (1) use all the allotted time for a detailed answer, (2) briefly indicate agreement or disagree-ment with another candidate or (3) choose not to answer. The moderator may encourage reluctant candidates to participate and try to keep any candidates from dominating the debate.

LOOSE QUESTION AND ANSWER/CROSS TALK FORMAT

This format resembles a good television talk show, with the moderator taking the role of host. The moderator poses questions or introduces issues and then guides the candidates in a discussion. During the discussion, the candidates may question each other, ask follow-up questions and offer rebuttals. It is the moderator's responsibility to ensure that all the candidates have an equal opportunity to speak to each issue and that the discussion does not stray too far away from the topic. The moderator must try to prevent the debate from degenerat-ing into a series of charges and counter charges.

This format is especially effective on television. It requires a strong moderator to keep the discussion on track and will work only if the candidates have agreed in advance to accept the moderator's authority.

Variations

❏ Topics can be introduced using taped descriptions with or without brief impartial analysis. In this way, the basics of the topic are set out and the candidates can use their time to discuss their positions.

❏ Candidates have a specified amount of time to speak during the entire debate or debate segment. Timekeepers keep track of how much cumulative time each candidate has used, and inform the candidates, moderator and audience as each candidate is about to run out of time.

CROSS QUESTIONING

Candidates ask each other questions, and the moderator acts as referee, enforcing the rules and keeping the debate on track. This format works best as one segment of a mixed-format debate. Since the candidates control the agenda, they can avoid bringing up issues of substance and allow the debate to focus on personalities or ask each other "sweetheart" questions.

On the other hand, this format allows the audience to evaluate candidates by their questions as well as their answers. Voters can gain insight into such character traits as fairness, aggressiveness, originality and the ability to plan and act strategically. *See Table 4.*

Table 4: Cross Questioning

Moderator introduces cross questioning segment	30 seconds
Candidate A poses question to Candidate B	30 seconds
Candidate B responds	2 minutes
Candidate B poses question to Candidate A	30 seconds
Candidate A responds	2 minutes

Variations

❏ The groundrules may restrict the questions to specified issue areas.

❏ Candidates may submit the questions in advance to be asked by the moderator.

❏ The questions and answers may be subject to time limits.

QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

In this "town meeting" format, members of the audience ask the candidates questions in turn. The format can be lively and spontaneous, raise issues of real interest to the voters and put the spotlight on citizen participation.

This format requires either a large, self-selected audience or an audience carefully chosen to represent diverse segments of the electorate, especially undecided voters. Candidates should not be able to pack the audience with their supporters.

Usually, there needs to be some control over the questions. Audience questions may be unclear, hostile and bullying, or attempt to draw attention to the questioner. Although asking audience members to submit questions in advance may sacrifice some spontaneity, it allows the sponsor to screen for repetition, clarity and appropriateness and to make sure each candidate gets approximately the same number of questions. Audience members may ask the chosen questions themselves or they may be read by the moderator.

Variations

❏ Viewers or listeners in the broadcast audience may phone in questions. The public may be asked to submit questions in advance of the debate.

❏ Films or tapes of questions posed by persons-in-the-street, school children, senior citizens or other special groups can be used.

❏ Questions may be submitted by e-mail or over the Internet.

SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES #1

(Date)

(Name)
(Address)
(City, State, ZIP)

Dear (Candidate's Name):

You are invited to take part in a Candidates (Meeting/Forum/Night) for candidates running for (name of office), to be held on (date, time and location). Sponsors of the meeting are (names of sponsors). They neither support nor oppose candidates for (office). All candidates for the office are being invited to participate.

A copy of the format that will be followed for the meeting and other instructions are enclosed for your information.

(If videotaping for TV airing add the following sentence: The meeting will be taped by [name and information — for example: Cincinnati Community Video for replay on cable access at various times before the election.])

We hope you will be able to attend this important event. Please indicate your acceptance of this invitation by signing and returning the attached acceptance notice to (me/name - add address if different from chair) no later than (date). If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at (phone) or by e-mail at (e-mail address).

Sincerely,

(Name of Committee Chair)
(Chair's Address)

CANDIDATES REPLY

   This form must be signed and returned in the envelope provided no later than (date).

I, _____ accept your invitation to

participate in (name of debate and date [for example: Board of Education candidates debate on October XX, 20XX]).

SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES #2

(Date)

(Name)
(Address)
(City, State, ZIP)

Dear (Candidate's Name):

You are invited to take part in a Candidates (Meeting/Forum/Night) for candidates running for (name of office), to be held on (date, time and location). Sponsors of the meeting are (names of sponsors). They neither support nor oppose candidates for (office). All candidates for the office are being invited to participate.

A copy of the format that will be followed for the meeting and other instructions are enclosed for your information.

(If videotaping for TV airing add the following sentence: The meeting will be taped by [name and information - for example: Cincinnati Community Video for replay on cable access at various times before the election.])

We hope you will be able to attend this important event. Please respond to (me/name) at (phone number/address) or by e-mail at (e-mail address) by (date) to confirm your attendance.

We look forward to meeting you on (date). If you have any questions concerning the meeting, please feel free to call (me/name) at above phone number.

Sincerely,

(Name of Committee Chair)
(Chair's Address if not listed above)

SAMPLE LETTER TO MODERATOR

(Date)

(Name)
(Address)
(City, State, ZIP)

Dear (Name):

Thank you for agreeing to moderate our Candidates (Meeting/Night/Forum) on (date, time and location). We expect the meeting to last for approximately (amount of time allotted - one hour, two hours, etc.).

Following is a brief description of the office(s) for which the candidates are running. (title of office, salary [optional], term, qualifications for office [if any particular qualifications needed] and duties).

Please make these guidelines clear to our audience.
(Enter the guidelines decided by the committee. For example - Questions should be written on a piece of paper/If time permits, we will take questions directly from the audience. Candidates will be given [number] minute(s) to answer each question, etc.)

Members of the audience will be given an opportunity to speak to individual candidates after adjournment in the (location).

If you have any questions, feel free to contact (me/name) at (phone number) or by e-mail at (e-mail address).

Sincerely,

(Name of Committee Chair)
(Chair's Address if not listed above)