

Organizing an All Candidates Meeting

What is an All-Candidates Meeting?

All candidates meetings are an opportunity for political candidates and residents to connect before an election. Residents have a chance to evaluate the candidates, political platforms, and ask questions about current issues.

Why should your Club host one?

- Candidates Meetings foster an interest in civic engagement and political affairs.
- Candidates Meetings are a public service and central to the democratic process.
- Candidates Meetings can give your Club a visible voice in your community.
- Candidates Meetings provide an opportunity for politicians to connect with the voting public.

Getting started

- Determine where, when and who else is sponsoring community debates.
- Consider collaborating with other local organizations.
- Assemble a committee or working group. Include members who are good at publicity, interested in current issues and are active in your community.
- Develop a budget. Include costs of printing, publicity, venue fees, refreshments
- Choose a venue, date and time.
- Select two alternate dates for your meeting - a few weeks before Election Day is ideal for maximum impact. This will help you when securing the participation of the candidates. A week day evening or during the day on a Saturday are ideal times to organize the meeting
- Determine the duration; most all-candidates meetings are no more than 2 hours.
- Secure an accessible, appropriate sized venue.
- Contact all candidates and their managers. Follow up in writing with details, format, and type of campaign materials that can be distributed

Develop your Meeting Format and Questions

- Prepare a slate of short, concise, non-partisan questions to augment questions from the floor
- Your event can also be organized as a more informal meet and greet, allowing

candidates and residents to mingle and ask/respond to questions on a more individual basis.

- Your meeting could also be organized around a specific theme (e.g. women), or aim to cover number of key issue areas including the economy, foreign policy, the environment, human rights and more.

Select a Moderator, Time Keeper and Bouncer

- Select a firm moderator who is a good public speaker, is politically aware, politically neutral and has a public profile.
- Appoint a timekeeper who can be firm. Use a stopwatch and timecards of 1 minute and 30 seconds to flash at candidates. Responses from candidates should be kept to 1 minutes each.
- Designate a “bouncer”. It may become necessary to ask some members of the audience to leave. Decide on this procedure beforehand.

Publicize the Event

- Posters: include date, place, time and candidates' and moderator's names. Include CFUW's logo and a contact person from your Club. Send to schools, libraries, community groups, contact lists, social media. Set up a Facebook event page.
- Prepare CFUW materials to advertise your Club and have someone to host table at entrance to auditorium.
- Send a press release to local paper, on line media and TV community calendars before media deadlines.

Set-Up on the Day of the Meeting

- Arrange tables and chairs so that audience can get to microphones on floor.
- Do a sound check to make sure all equipment is working. Try to have one microphone for each speaker, and multiple (e.g. 2-4) in the aisles.

Program for the Meeting

- Give candidates a table to display election materials outside the door. Do not allow election posters from candidates on property other than at designated tables.
- Greet candidates and the moderator and lead them to assigned seats on stage.
- Begin on time and end on time. Maximum two hours.
- Begin with welcome by CFUW president or designated member, outline the purpose of the event, and give a **very brief** introduction to CFUW (e.g. aims and objectives of organization, scholarships awarded locally).
- Moderator introduces themselves and state their neutrality, review the evening's format, order of questions, time lines, and outline procedure for audience questions, time limit for individual questions.

- Allow one-minute opening statement by each candidate.
- Have moderator ask prioritized questions addressed to all candidates, giving them one minute each to answer.
- For questions from the audience, alternate questions from microphones, one minute for answer from candidates addressed, followed by 30 seconds for other candidates to rebut if desired.
- At the end of event, moderator hands over the meeting to CFUW:
 - Thank the candidates, moderator, volunteers and residents for their participation.
 - Remind audience to fill out evaluation sheets

Evaluate and Acknowledge

- Send thank you notes and small token gifts to the moderator and volunteers, thank you notes to the candidates
- Remember you will never please everyone and some comments will be by committed party workers.

References

Scarborough Civic Action Network. *Guide to Organizing an All- Candidates Meeting.*

<http://www.scarboroughcan.ca/sites/default/files/users/Guide%20to%20Organizing%20an%20All%20Candidates%20Meeting%20or%20Debate.pdf>

City of Toronto. Ward All-Candidates Meetings

<https://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=573d0f1025c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD&vgnextchannel=9632acb640c21410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD#organizing>

BCSTA. The Education Leader. A Guide to Hosting an All-Candidates' Meeting

<http://www.bcsta.org/TheLeader/index.php/2017/03/30/hosting-an-all-candidates-meeting/>

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