**Ontario Election 2014: Engage Your Candidates this Election!**

**All-Candidates Forums or Town Hall Meetings**

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| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| * Public meetings with larger audiences mean more opportunities for messaging and increased opportunity for media exposure * Opportunity for community members to participate in the electoral process * Opportunity for community networks or organizations to work together on a project | * Event organization can be involved and it can be difficult to schedule all candidates to be available at the same time and place * Spontaneity at a large public event can lead to unanticipated results |

**START EARLY**

Schedule the event early, ideally in the last two weeks of the campaign.

**COLLABORATE**

Put together a committee to organize the forum. Although one organization can organize the event, an existing community network, representatives from like-minded organizations or like-minded individuals are often more effective to share tasks to be done. Learn from other local organizations that have experience with this type of event.

**ROLES**

Tip: Assign a committee chair to help ensure that the event is both well-organized and well-run!

Committee members will:

* Contact all candidates and campaign teams by letter and personal follow-up.
* Develop a key theme for the event: this could be social policy issues, economic development or other broader issues.
* Develop a communications plan including community outreach and media relations.
* Liaise with the campaign team to negotiate the date, time and length of the event, how the event will proceed (e.g. order of speakers, maximum speaking time, managing a question & answer period) and outline terms of engagement.
* Develop a budget and plan for any expenses.
* Invite and liaise with media to cover the event.
* Find a location and organize logistics (e.g. seating, stage or front of room set-up, podium, AV equipment, checking all logistics early on the day of the event).
* Create a post-event plan for follow-up.
* Approve all event materials, including media releases.
* Be in frequent contact with the campaign staff and update them as the event develops. At the event, they should meet the candidates at the door and escort them to the stage or speaking area.

Tip: Finding a strong moderator that all parties will trust is absolutely essential to keeping the event on track in a fair and nonpartisan manner- and deal with the unexpected. A moderator could be a well-known media personality, a community board member, or a city leader from a local school board or a post-secondary institution.

**PREPARE**

Designate specific committee members who can act as media contacts and spokespeople at the event. This helps clarity and consistent messaging. As part of their role, they will contact local media as soon as the date and time are finalized. On behalf of the committee, they will send out a media release the day before the event. On the day of the event, they will set up and staff a media table.

***What to do if…***

A candidate declines, doesn’t respond to the invite or can’t attend the event at the last minute?

*Have the event Chair introduce the candidates on stage and read the names of those absent. (The “empty chair” approach can be confrontational!).*

**AT THE EVENT**

Ensure that key questions are asked to candidates about priorities for the sector/your organization. Assign nonpartisan questions to committee members, or get help from audience members.  
  
Stay on time. Start and end the event as scheduled.

**FOLLOW UP**

Send thank-you letters, including a contact person for further questions.

**HELPFUL RESOURCES**

**Campaign 2000:** [**Election Resource Kit**](http://www.campaign2000.ca/Ontario/2014OntarioElectionResourceKit.pdf)

**On Co-op:** [**Election Toolkits**](http://www.ontario.coop/documents_downloads?search=Enter+Keywords&oldsearch=Enter+Keywords&type=1&category=0&sortby=date)

**Ontario Non-profit Housing Association:** [**Election Toolkits**](mailto:http://www.onpha.on.ca/onpha/web/Policyandresearch/2014_Elections/Content/PolicyAndResearch/2014_Elections/2014_Elections.aspx%3Fhkey=e4d35614-a943-4405-b926-74616c1e3c81)

**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)

For more election tools and tips, go to <http://www.theonn.ca/ontario-election-2014>.