

HOST A CANDIDATES FORUM

Many people do not vote because they don't feel connected to the candidates or issues at stake in an election. A candidates forum is a public event where candidates running for office are invited to answer moderated questions and express their positions on different issues in their district. Whether for a local, state, or federal election, hosting a candidates forum is a great way to engage your faith community around an upcoming election, increase communication between candidates and their constituents, build support for the issues that matter to you, and to learn more about those who are running to represent you. You can also work with other faith communities and organizations in your area to host an event together.

When planning a candidates forum, remember to keep it nonpartisan! Not only is it required for 501(c)(3) organizations (as faith communities and many non-profits are), but doing so also encourages attendance by candidates, attracts more interest from the media, and is an effective tool for engaging your whole community around the issues that matter to them. This can be done by having a neutral moderator, covering a broad range of issues, and inviting all viable candidates for a specific office to your forum.

Hosting a candidates forum requires careful pre-planning and thought. Hosting such an event is an effective tool to connect your faith community not only to the candidates in an election, but also to the wider community and district. Faith Action Network often sponsors candidates forums, so be in contact with our office as you plan! We would love to help your forum run smoothly and be a success.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you plan to host a candidates forum:

1. Choose which level of government you want to focus the forum on (county, local, state, federal). This can be done in consultation with FAN. The timing of the event will take place around elections and will depend on whether it's a candidates forum for primary elections or for general elections.
2. Think way, way ahead! Start planning the forum many months in advance of when the actual forum will take place. This will give you time to coordinate a date/time/location, invite all candidates and the media, select a moderator, and to make sure you have a large audience in attendance.
3. Questions to ask yourself as you begin planning:
 - Will you have a focus on certain issues for the forum, like criminal justice or climate change? Or keep it broad to all topics?

- What will the format be? This could be collecting prepared questions from the community in advance, time for prepared statements from the candidates and follow-up questions from the audience, or a combination of different formats. Work with your moderator to determine the best format for you. Leave time for closing remarks and an informal Q&A or gathering after the forum for the candidates to talk with the constituents.

4. Don't forget about logistics!

- Have all the candidates been invited? Send an invitation letter or email to all candidates well before the planned event and follow-up with a phone call. It may take some time to find a date that will work for the schedules of the candidates in a race. Be flexible! You can work with FAN to make sure all candidates are invited and are able to attend.
- Will you have food at the event? Snacks? Drinks?
- Are you hosting your event in an [accessible venue](#)? How will you work to ensure your event is inclusive and accommodating to those with disabilities?
- Keep it non-partisan! You cannot endorse a candidate, a political party, or show strong bias.
- Make sure to promote, promote, promote! Candidates want a large audience at a forum!
- Do you want to inform the media? You can invite local newspapers, radio and TV stations, and other press to promote or attend the event. This will get coverage out to a wider audience!
- Will you have sign-in sheets, so you can follow-up with those in attendance after the event? Or information on voter registration and election dates?

5. After the event, send a thank you letter to the candidates and moderator. If you had a sign-up sheet for those in attendance, you could also send them a follow-up email to thank them for coming and let them know about other opportunities to stay involved.

FAITH ACTION NETWORK

3720 Airport Way S, Seattle, WA | 206 625 9790 | fan@fanwa.org | www.fanwa.org