

Putting Together a Candidate Forum

The following link will send you to a very helpful “how-to” at the AAUW website, [AAUW's Putting Together a Candidate Forum](#)

Before you start your planning, remember the following AAUW policies:

- You may not endorse a candidate for elective office in the name of AAUW.
- If there are two or more candidates running for an elective office, both must be invited to the Forum.
- If your branch has a 501 (c) 3 tax status, in the case that one of the invited candidates for a particular office or that candidate’s representative cannot attend, the other candidate may be introduced but cannot speak during the forum. If your branch has a 501 (c) 4 tax status, in the case that one of the invited candidates for a particular office or that candidate’s representative cannot attend, the other candidate may speak during the forum. The moderator must explain that the other candidate was invited and give the reason that person is not present. If no reason was given, the moderator should indicate that in the explanation.
- The moderator must be a respected member of the community who will remain neutral during the proceedings.

Format for the Candidate Forum

The following is a time-tested format that is very similar to that used by League of Women Voters:

The moderator opens the forum with short remarks such as “Welcome to tonight’s Candidate Forum, sponsored by AAUW- XXX Branch and (co-sponsors) and broadcast by (radio or TV station). I am Jane Doe, an AAUW member/member of coalition organization, and I will be the moderator this evening. We have prepared ___ number of questions for the candidates. We will distribute paper or cards for audience members to write their questions for the candidates as well. **In case of a live TV or radio audience, add the following:** Our telephone number for tonight is (either one or two cell phones or a number at the building where the forum is being held that is dedicated to calls for the forum). We request that audience members not applaud or in other ways respond to candidate remarks.

Each candidate is then introduced and will have 1 ½ minutes for an opening statement. After the statements, give the phone number(s) again.

The introductions are followed by questions from the audience. These can be directed to all candidates or just the candidates for a particular race. Candidates can have one minute to answer the question or 90 seconds, if it requires a longer answer. Both candidates for an office would be given equal time to answer the same question. Sometimes a candidate may ask for time for a rebuttal. This may be granted as long as the opponent has equal time for a rebuttal. Mention the phone number frequently.

After about 1 hour of questions (or more if the radio or TV station agrees beforehand), the candidates will each have 1 minute for closing remarks.

The moderator closes the forum as follows: “On behalf of AAUW-- XXX Branch and coalition organizations, we thank you candidates for your comments and our audience here at (location) as well as the listening/viewing audience for your attendance at the Candidate Forum. Our thanks to (radio/television station) for broadcasting the forum. And now we remind you to exercise your right to vote on Tuesday, November 4.”

Preparation for the Candidate Forum

In August or very early September(much earlier for statewide and/or races for the U.S. Senate or House), determine which races to cover. Branches in smaller towns may want to cover courthouse races and Iowa legislative races. Branches in large cities may want to cover races for the U.S. Senate or House and /or statewide races. If you don't know who is running for offices in your county or legislative district, call the County Auditor's Office.

Determine other like-minded groups to work as a coalition and invite them to join you.

Send out letters of invitation to candidates as soon as possible since their schedules are very busy.

Secure a meeting place and invite a radio/TV station to cover the forum.

Ask someone to moderate the forum.

Ask for volunteers to do the following:

- Publicity in paper, radio, TV, social media
- Bring bottles of water for candidates, moderator; name tents for candidates; paper and pencils for questions
- Room set up: Radio or TV station will have mikes for candidates, if the forum will be broadcast live; podium for moderator; tables for candidates; chairs for audience; assure that area behind the candidates is not distracting.
- Timer to indicate to candidates when their time is up.
- Sifting Committee of 2 or 3 (from different political parties) to reword questions to make them more understandable, combine similar questions, avoid repetition.

- Phone bank volunteers to write down the phone questions and take to sifting committee during the forum
- Question gatherers (Circulate through audience and pass out paper and pencils for questions. Gather questions and take to sifting committee.)