

# ORGANIZING CANDIDATE FORUMS

## THE BASICS

As a trusted, nonpartisan voice in the community, AAUW branches are uniquely suited to host candidate forums. A candidate forum is a public event where candidates running for office are invited to express their positions. Whether for a local, state, or federal election, candidate forums are a great way to engage and educate your community about an upcoming election and the candidates seeking the honor of your vote.

### Plan Ahead

Pick a time and date that avoids religious or government holidays, other community events, or major sporting events. Invite candidates in writing 2-3 weeks before the planned event and follow up to coordinate dates and times. You may need to be flexible to find a date that will work for all the candidates' schedules.

### Invite all major Candidates

Pick a location that is accessible and will attract a broad range of attendees such as a library or, community center.

As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, AAUW must extend an invitation to all major-party candidates in each election. Be flexible! It may take some time to find a date that will work for all the candidates' schedules. When inviting candidates, send them AAUW issue fact sheets and the AAUW Public Policy Priorities.

## STAY OUT OF TROUBLE BY STAYING NONPARTISAN

Staying nonpartisan is pretty straightforward. Any candidate forum must not imply approval or disapproval of any of the candidates. Invite all legally qualified candidates for a specific office and make an equal effort to encourage each of them to attend.

Choose a neutral site for your forum — one that is not associated with any party, candidate or overly partisan issue. Your event should avoid any leading questions that point to a desired answer from candidates. Use [AAUW's Voter Issue Guide](#) for sample questions.

Provide nonpartisan voter guides and voter registration materials for your audience. Have a separate table outside the room of the forum for candidates to place campaign literature.

Familiarize yourself with [AAUW's Board of Directors' policies](#) before holding a candidate forum.

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## SELECT A FORMAT

Regardless of your format, you'll need a moderator to introduce the candidates, start the dialogue, and keep the discussion moving. Ask a well-known, nonpartisan member of your community to serve in this role – they will help generate interest in the event and add credibility. Possible options include:

### Option 1

Candidates give prepared remarks, and attendees ask follow-up questions from microphones in the audience.

### Option 2

Candidates are asked prepared questions on themes important to AAUW and your community.

### Option 3

Candidates are asked questions that the audience submits on index cards. At the end, candidates provide closing statements, with an equal amount of time given to each candidate.

## MATERIALS

Set up a check-in table where attendees can pick up information about AAUW and other nonpartisan partners. Print out a QR code so people can sign up for AAUW's Two-Minute Activist. Note, the IRS rules prohibit distributing issue advocacy materials in conjunction with a voter registration drive. See [this link](#) for more information or email us at [policy@aauw.org](mailto:policy@aauw.org)

To learn more about the AAUW Action Fund, please email [Policy@aauw.org](mailto:Policy@aauw.org) or visit [www.aauwaction.org](http://www.aauwaction.org).