

AAUW WORKSHOP – CANDIDATES’ FORUMS

MARCH 27, 2004

Why have a candidates’ forum?

Who will be your audience?

2 ½ months before:

Have one meeting inviting all groups you want to include. Hand out list of duties.

Organized civic groups (AAUW, LWV, BPW, Lions, Rotary, etc.)

Have blackboard/newsprint to record publicly group contributing to some facet of event.

Include on list:

Time (6:30 – 9 PM on a weeknight works well)

Place (churches are good because they have multiple rooms)

Invitation to candidates (List groups cooperating;)

Media contact/publicity for newsletters, radio, newspaper, community calendar, etc. (Possibly a “Hold The Date” postcard)

Physical set-up (includes parking details)

Equipment – microphones, podiums, name tags, decorations, tables for handouts, brochures, etc.

Refreshments (can be very simple – cookies and cider)

Hand-outs (ballots, if ready; lists of candidates; outline of event schedule; civic information, etc.)

Introductions

(Decide how candidates will be presented to voters)

Speaker (if you have one)

Timer (for groups to change rooms, or for candidates who speak on a panel)

Questions prepared in advance or *ad hoc* from voters

Evaluation (from participants and sponsors)

Clean up

Have one meeting after the event to review, note successes and items to improve. Keep notes and file with details.

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Questions to answer at planning meeting:

➤ **Which candidates will be invited?**

Local/State/Federal legislative candidates; judges; other offices)

Each group needs some special research and handling. Biographies, length of office, details of services. For instance, if Clerks of Court are invited, a handout, which they may provide, on what the duties of the Clerk are. Judges cover different areas. A handout outlining the judicial hierarchy is useful. Candidates for the General Assembly also have special duties, most important being the passage of laws and a budget.

➤ **Decide on the physical set-up.** Several work.

Assign people to rooms or tables, using a simple color name tag method available in equal quantities as people sign in; Candidates move from table to table on a schedule (ring a bell, sound a horn, etc.) Hall monitors may be needed depending on size of facility.

Candidates stay in one spot and the people move from one to another on a schedule.

Voters act as an audience; candidates give a short speech.

Voters act as an audience; candidates answer questions. Some questions really do need to be prepared in advance for this to move smoothly. Decide whether follow-up questions will be allowed and how long candidate has to answer and whether opponent is given equal time to either rebut or say something else. Recite rules at the beginning. Ask questions topically. Good humor helps keep candidates and audience less tense.

Or, cards can be given to voters when they register, asking for topic heading and question written. Then moderator can arrange. Since this takes a little time, either candidate speeches or a speaker should start the event. If your Board of Elections Director is available, information about voting itself is useful.

Or, rooms are set up as issue centers and both candidates and voters migrate to the ones they are interested in. You need information sheets to enhance this option.

A single gathering space is best if there are one or two "hot topics" that everyone will want to weigh in on, and everyone will want to hear the answers. This is sometimes a debate, so be prepared.

PRO'S

and

CON'S

Issue centers

Voters with special interests can gather together to quiz candidate.

Other voters don't get a chance to find out about the issue.

Candidate stays/Voter moves

Voter gets to see all candidates up close and in small groups

Voter may choose not to attend so doesn't hear all candidates

Candidate moves/Voter stays

Familiar group makes voters more relaxed

Familiar group does not raise all pertinent issues

Candidates speak

Everyone hears same speech. Candidate does not have to repeat.

Least dynamic; Voters does not get a chance to interact one on one

Question & Answer format

Issues can be raised and followed-up with nimble moderator

Questions may be redundant or tangential without able moderator.

➤ Select greeter/introducer/moderator/goodbye-er

How people are met when they come and how they are encouraged when they leave is fundamental to them thinking it was a good process and to them feeling that they will make the effort to vote. Voting is a frightening process for some; for others it is frustrating or worthless because "the fix is in." Some light-heartedness is very useful.