

The webinar will begin shortly...

**This presentation will be recorded and sent out to
all attendees with the PowerPoint**

Effectively Engaging Candidates at Your Nonprofit



About Nonprofit VOTE

Founded in 2005, Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. We are the leading source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services.

Visit www.nonprofitvote.org for our free resources, including factsheets, checklists, toolkits, and additional webinars.

Agenda

- Different ways to do nonpartisan candidate engagement
- Case study
 - How Habitat for Humanity Metro Maryland Engaged Candidates through forums and questionnaires
- Staying nonpartisan when working with candidates
- Q & A with presenters



Sarah Reddinger
Habitat for Humanity
Metro Maryland



Ronnie Pawelko
Alliance for Justice

Ways You Can Engage Candidates at Your Nonprofit or in the Community

Candidate Engagement Activities

In person

- Appearances: Candidate vs. non-candidate capacity
- Debates and forums: Equal opportunity for participation to all viable candidates seeking the same office
 - Host your own
 - Attend another organization's forum and ask a question

Other ways to engage

- Educating Voters: Candidate questionnaires
 - Create your own
 - Distribute another organization's nonpartisan questionnaire or voter guide
- Educating Candidates: Sharing your research and policy ideas

Candidate Engagement Activities

Candidate Forums



Plan early!

- Choose your format
- Select a date and location
- Invite all candidates

Types of formats:

- Equal time Q&A with moderator or panelists – decide if follow up Q&A is allowed. (Most popular format)
- Prepared or spontaneous debate
- Discourse debate
- Town Meeting Q&A
- Unconventional candidate events

Candidate Appearances



A candidate appearance is a good alternative to a forum if:

- Your capacity to host or sponsor is limited due to another large event planned during election season
- You think the candidates would be more likely to attend
- A candidate backs out of the forum at the last minute.

Candidate Engagement Activities

Candidate Questionnaires

- Get partners or form a coalition
- Cover a broad range of issues
- Ask open ended questions
- Keep it short & give ample time
- Be prepared to follow up
- Make responses available to the general public

Pros:

- Can reach a broader audience than a one-time event
- No need to find or rent a venue

Cons:

- Still need to do a lot of follow up with candidates to get answers
- No interaction with community members



Sarah Reddinger
Director of Programs Services

Habitat Metro Maryland

- Very Large Service Area
- 13 Office Staff
- NR Affiliate
- 2-4 Homes per year
- 80-100 Repair/Weatherization per year
- 2 ReStores



Montgomery Housing Alliance

- Organizations looking to further development & preservation of affordable housing
- Mostly focused on increasing Housing Initiative Fund
 - Met infrequently outside of budget cycle



Term Limits

- 3 years ago voters imposed term limits on county councilmembers & executive
- 2018 saw 5 councilmembers & executive leave
- More than 30 candidates ran for 3 council seats & 7 for executive

New Opportunities

- Candidates looking for a way to stand out
- Many forums were being held
- Voters were more engaged
- Change is an opportunity for innovation in policy

**SOCIAL
CHANGE
IS GOOD**

Alliance Recommitment

- Alliance members saw the opportunity
 - Met monthly
 - Created sub-committees
 - Organized efforts
 - Created advocacy agenda that went beyond Housing Initiative Fund

Candidate Surveys

- Created 6 unbiased survey questions on affordable housing
- Surveys were sent to all candidates with deadline to respond
- Surveys were posted online and shared via social media, email, website etc.

County Executive Candidate Forum



- Invited all candidates to participate in affordable housing forum
- Alliance members organized & ran the event
- Held at local housing authority
- Freddie Mac employee served as moderator

Executive Candidate Forum

- More than 150 attendees – one of the larger forum turnouts
- Event was filmed and posted online
- League of Women Voters provided onsite voter registration



Benefits of Voter & Candidate Engagement



- Candidates visually see support for your issue
- Inform voters where candidates stand
- Public responses hold elected officials accountable

Staying Nonpartisan When Engaging Candidates

Ronnie Pawelko, Alliance for Justice

Staying Nonpartisan When Engaging Candidates

Candidate Forums

- Cover a broad range of issues
- Invitations to all viable candidates
- Each candidate should be given equal time to present their view on issues
- Candidates are not asked to agree with specific positions or platforms
- Moderator stays neutral and does not imply approval or disapproval of candidates

Tip! Set the Tone

You can ask audience members to check their campaign/partisan materials at the door and to respectfully refrain from excessive exuberance for or against candidates.

Staying Nonpartisan When Engaging Candidates

Asking a question at a forum

Make sure....

- Your approach is nonpartisan
- You pose the question to all candidates
- The question doesn't imply a correct answer

A note on ballot measures and policy advocacy:

Nonprofits can take positions on ballot measures. These can be included in voter guides or shared with candidates. This is not considered partisan activity.

Staying Nonpartisan When Engaging Candidates

Questionnaires

- Questions should be neutral and not hint at a “correct” answer
- Distribute the questionnaire to all candidates running for the same office
- Don’t share one candidate’s answers with another candidate before publication
- Clarify meanings of questions, but don’t coach candidates on how to answer
- Do not rank or comment on candidates’ responses

Help! Only one candidate responded to the questionnaire.

What do we do?

Staying Nonpartisan When Engaging Candidates



Sharing Your Policy Ideas

Make sure your approach is nonpartisan

- You pose the question to all candidates
- The question doesn't imply a correct answer

Talking About Candidates

- Comparing? It's **okay to compare** candidates in questionnaires and voter guides. Keep your opinion out of it.
- Criticizing? Avoid making positive or negative statements about candidates. **You may correct a factual misstatement** related to your issue.
- Ranking? A charity **may not publish rankings or ratings of candidates.**

Staying Nonpartisan When Engaging Candidates

What Nonprofit Staff Can do

What:

- Volunteer on campaigns
- Attend political events
- Support your candidate
- Run for office

When:

- Personal time outside work hours
- On vacation
- On personal days
- On unpaid leave

Basic Guideline:

Nonprofit staff are free to engage in partisan activities, such as supporting a candidate, on their own time (i.e., outside of work).

Question & Answer

Use the chat box to send us your questions.