

Organizing a candidate forum: Quick guide for PNHP chapters

1. **Organize a committee to plan the event.** For an in-person candidate forum, start 3-4 months in advance so you have time to choose a venue, and set a date and time that works for the candidates and moderator. Online forums require at least several weeks. If a candidate will not attend, you can note their absence with an empty chair and nametag, or offer to read a statement from the candidate.
2. **Choose a moderator for the event.** Ideas include the editor of the local newspaper, a radio announcer, or a well-known community leader. The moderator should be comfortable asking questions and assertively keeping the program on track.
3. **Decide on a theme and title for the event.** Is it a debate between candidates, or a community forum with audience participation and community experts? Will you focus on health care, or other issues as well?
4. **Invite other groups to co-sponsor the event.** All groups can help promote the event and provide volunteers and participants.
5. **Develop a specific agenda for the event:**
 - What is the total event time? Don't go more than 90 minutes, especially online.
 - How much time will you give each candidate for opening or closing statements?
 - How many questions will you ask each candidate and how much time do they have to respond?
 - How much time for audience questions?
6. **Manage audience participation.** There are several options for questions:
 - Place a standing microphone in the center aisle or side of the room where audience members can line up to ask questions;
 - Volunteers can roam with a wireless mic (hold the mic to keep participants from speaking too long);
 - Distribute index cards at the beginning of the event for participants to write down questions for the moderator;
 - For an online forum, determine if participants can ask questions directly (decide who will control the muting), or by typing questions into the chat. You may also request that audience members email questions ahead of time.
7. **Promote the event.** Create a press release and distribute to local media. Create a graphic “poster” and share to web calendars and social media. Create a Facebook event and share widely. Print a poster and ask local businesses to post in their windows.
8. **Recruit volunteers.** Assign volunteers to:
 - Set up, welcome guests at the door, manage sign-in sheets and handouts.
 - Welcome and escort the candidates and moderator.
 - Start the program by introducing the candidates and moderator, and rules for audience participation. Make a pitch for the sponsoring organizations and state that we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that does not endorse candidates for office.
 - Enforce time limits by using signs reading “1 minute”, “30 sec.”, “DONE!”
 - Take photos and post them to social media, and live-tweet the event.



Thanks to Karen Green Stone of Medicare for All Indiana for developing this guide.

For assistance planning events, please contact the PNHP organizing team at organizer@pnhp.org.