



Organize an All-Candidates Meeting

One effective way for a congregation to get involved in democracy is to organize an all-candidates meeting. By doing so you send the community the message that

- public debate matters
- the church has an interest in the issues discussed
- people who are affected by political policies have a right to participate in all the conversations—this is community!

Your faith community can host a non-partisan all-candidates meeting leading up to an election.

- Invite all candidates in your riding to share their views and answer audience questions.
- Provide a platform for local candidates to engage with church members and the local community about where they stand on the issues.

Here are Some Tips to Organize an Online or In-Person All-Candidates Meeting

Detailed Plan for an Online Meeting

- 1.** Think about who in your community is directly affected by government policy. Invite them to be on your planning team.
- 2.** Partner with community organizations, other churches, or other faith groups to include more opinions and voices, build partnerships reflecting a diversity of voter's voices and opinions. If you are already working on an issue together, focus your meeting on that issue.
- 3.** Form a planning team early to build partnerships and have candidates committed to your event.
- 4.** Choose a virtual platform, possible dates, and a time for the meeting. Give the candidates a range of dates so you can schedule a day that works for everyone.
- 5.** Consider the accessibility of your format (see page 1).
- 6.** Plan the format of your meeting. Here's a common one:
 - Allow five minutes for each candidate's opening remarks, and choose the order of speaking—maybe in alphabetical order by last name or by drawing numbers ahead of time.
 - Allow an hour for the question-and-answer period. Decide whether audience members or a moderator will ask the questions. Allow 30 seconds for each question and one minute for the answer.
 - Give candidates three minutes each for closing remarks. Choose the order of speaking, maybe in reverse order from the opening remarks.

Accessibility

- Online platforms often offer captions. Find out how to activate this feature.
- Does your chosen space or format have a sound system or hearing assist system? Consider a sign language interpreter too.
- Is your space physically accessible?
- Are there people who may not usually enter a Christian sanctuary? Can you provide information that increases their comfort level, or can you use the church hall?
- Is your location accessible by public transit? Is parking easy?

Check out [Elections Canada's resources](#) on increasing the accessibility of voting.

7. Choose an engaging debate moderator.

- The moderator introduces the candidates and moderates questions from the audience without getting involved. Moderators are neutral.
- They explain the guidelines and schedule for the meeting, and make sure the rules are followed.
- You might ask the audience to submit questions to the moderator in advance.

8. Choose a timekeeper to monitor and notify the candidates and questioners of the time limits. This person has a stopwatch and gavel or bell. They let candidates know one minute before the end of their time limit for opening and closing remarks.

9. Send an invitation to the candidates asking them to participate. Include the guidelines and format for the evening. Ask them to provide a short biography to help the moderator introduce them. If a candidate says no or does not return calls, publicly note their absence at the meeting.

10. Advertise your meeting. Be sure to use the informal networks of all your planning partners and all media channels available to you.

11. Set up for your meeting. The preferred format for this election is an online meeting. For a detailed in person set up contact justice@united-church.ca.

- Ensure you have the technical expertise to operate on the platform you have chosen.
- Consider hosting as a webinar (possible additional cost) so that your audience is muted, but able to communicate via chat to hosts.
- Ensure you and all the candidates have stable internet access.
- Host a rehearsal that includes key participants and ensures everyone is familiar with the equipment they will use for the meeting. During rehearsal, review the time constraints and remind candidates that they will be muted when the time runs out.
- Make sure the moderator has experience moderating in an online format.
- Make sure both moderator and timekeepers are co-hosts so they can mute candidates as necessary.
- Have questions submitted directly via the chat. You

can set up the meeting so the chat is only seen by hosts, which will limit distracting or rude text being seen by the full group.

- Or, have questions submitted ahead of time to a designated email. This person can then share questions directly with moderator when the time is right.
- If you are recording, let everyone know this is happening (Zoom automatically tells participants).
- Consider ways to make the recording widely available after the meeting as additional voter education.
- Be familiar with the accessibility features of your chosen format and use them. Let the community know what features will be available ahead of time.
- Consider registration or a password system to ensure more control and to prevent your meeting being spammed or interrupted.

12. After the meeting:

- Debrief: Review and assess the successes and challenges and what could be improved next time.
- Write a follow-up media release. Include quotations and a media contact.
- Send thank-you letters to candidates, organizers, partners, and any other contributors.

Simple Plan

The detailed plan opposite outlines a traditional format for an all-candidates meeting. This might not work for your faith community or the people you want to engage. To be non-partisan, all—or at least the agreed-upon main parties'—candidates running in a riding need to be invited. One community decided they could not host a traditional meeting because the number of candidates in their municipal election was too large. They invited all the candidates and gave them each an opportunity for short opening remarks. Following the opening remarks, refreshments were available and attendees were invited to circulate and talk to individual candidates and browse their literature tables. There was no debate or way to see how one candidate's approach compared to another's, but the event introduced candidates and voters to each other.