NCC Candidate Forum Guide

WHAT IS A CANDIDATE FORUM?

A candidate forum is a public event where candidates running for parliament are invited to express their positions and policies on issues to their community. Whether for a local, state, or federal election, a candidate forum is a great way to engage your community around an upcoming election, to build support for nature and climate issues, and to learn more about the candidates running to represent you.

HOW TO ORGANISE A CANDIDATE FORUM?

Step 1: Date & Cohosts
Choose a few dates that suit your group that you can propose to candidates you'd like to invite. You can also invite other groups or organisations with similar focuses to cohost the forum with you. This means they can help with recruitment and help design the format of the forum.

Step 2: Venue
Find a venue. Some ideas are a local community hall, a school hall, or a local theatre. Keep in mind how many people you want to attend so that the venue can cater to it. It will need to have a sufficient amount of chairs, be accessible, a bathroom, and preferably have a microphone (or you can hire one separately). Try and find one that aligns with the date options you choose.

There is also the option to hold an online candidate forum, for example over Zoom. There are positives and negatives of this.

Possible positives:
- It can be more accessible if people live further away, or have children etc., aren't able to drive or catch public transport easily
- It may be easier to record if you don't have camera equipment
- It may make it easier for candidates to attend

Possible negatives:
- Often get a higher dropout rate, potentially lower attendance
- People often find in person events more engaging
- Less of an opportunity for organic relationship building/relational conversations between attendees

Step 3: Candidates

Get in touch with the candidates for your electorate and invite them to the forum. Explain who you are, who your group is and why you're eager to hear from them. Be polite, and it's often useful to give them a couple of date options. It is useful to also let them know who else you plan to invite, and how long they will have to speak so they can formulate their answers appropriately. Explain what the format will be, for example, they will receive five questions prior to the forum to answer with two minutes per answer, then questions from the audience afterwards.

You may need to follow up with them a couple of times to get through to lock in a date. When you've locked in a date, send formal invitations to the candidates with all the details they need to know.

Step 4: Issues

Decide on the specific issues that you would like each candidate to address. Write out some questions that you will ask each candidate based on these issues. These should be specific and be able to be addressed to all candidates. You could also ask for some sort of commitment from each candidate in the question. You can come together as a group to decide on these, and you can also outsource some ideas from talking to the community at market stalls or from door-knocking. You can see some recording of past candidate forums that NCC has hosted or cohosted on our [Youtube channel](#).

Once you've finalised the questions you'd like to ask, you can send these through to the candidates prior to the forum so that they have time to prepare their answers.

Step 5: Agenda

Create an agenda sheet. To make sure the event goes smoothly and runs to time, make sure you plan out the order of events and how long each should take. Designate roles for an MC and tech team. An MC will be responsible for introducing the candidates, asking the

questions and ensuring the candidates stick to time. Depending on whether the candidate forum is on online or in person, the tech team will be responsible for things like the microphone and camera, or if online, muting/unmuting people, monitoring the chat etc.

If you would like an example template of an agenda sheet, please let us know!

Step 6: Recruit
Once the event time and location is set up, get recruiting for attendees! Candidate Forums are a great way for the community to feel like they can be heard by their representatives. Here are some recruitment methods:

- *Social media* – post to platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to let people know about the event and provide details. You can also create a Facebook event for people to RSVP to.
- *Website* – if your group has a website, you can put the event on there. Depending on what website provider you use, you can also ask people to register for the event online so you can track interest.
- *Posters* - You can ask shops and restaurants if you can put a poster up about it in their window.
- *Talking directly to the community* – if you have a market stall, door-knocking event or some other kind of creative event like a picnic or bushwalk, it's a great chance to let people know about the upcoming Candidate Forum. If people are feeling frustrated about an issue, you can explain that a Candidate Forum is a great way to let your representative know what is important to the local community and ask them what kind of questions they would like to see asked.
- *Use your network* – tell your family, friends, colleagues, whoever you have a positive relationship with about the event! Even if they're not overly politically engaged, but they're passionate about nature and climate, explain why the forum is important for making sure nature and climate are at the top of the candidates minds during the election.
- *Local radio station/newspaper/magazine* - get in touch with your local radio stations/newspaper and let them know about the event and ask if they'd be happy to feature it. Explain the value of the event and that the more people that attend, the more powerful it will be.
- *Media* – you can also invite the local media to cover the event.

Step 7: Questions from the audience

It is up to you to decide prior to the event if you will take questions from the audience.
There are a few ways to do this:

In person:

- Live – attendees can raise their hand and a microphone is passed to them
- Pre-register – attendees can submit their questions prior, and these can either be read out by them or the MC
- Use an app to collect questions such as [Slido](#). This is where people can enter their question online using their phones, and the top questions can be read out by the MC

Online:

- Live – attendees can digitally 'raise their hand' if using a program such as Zoom if they have a question
- Pre-register – attendees can submit their questions prior, and these can either be read out by them or the MC
- Use an app to collect questions such as [Slido](#). This is where people can enter their question online using their phones, and the top questions can be read out by the MC.
- Attendees can also post their questions in the chat during the forum, which can be collated by your tech team. They then choose the most relevant questions for the MC to read out.

Step 8: Record

It's useful to record the forum if you can, so that people who missed it can access it and you can go over the forum again later if needed. If live, it could be filmed (make sure you ask for consent prior), you can use a voice recorder, or have someone delegated to minute taking.

If online, Zoom and other programs have a record function.

Step 9: Follow Up

After the event, thank the candidates who attended and the community for coming. You can incorporate the candidates' responses as part of your campaigning practices.

Reach out to use for ways that NCC can support you! We can potentially help with strategy, recruitment, and possibly even help facilitate the event depending on the time/location etc. By becoming a member at NCC, you will also be able to use our relationship to add more weight to the event. **Click here for more information and to find out about other benefits**.

Get in touch at ncc@nature.org.au or by calling (02) 9516 1488