

General Tips for Hosting a Candidate Forum

Location

- Hold the event in the district **BEFORE the Nov. 2nd election** – June/July/August/early September are best; Candidates' schedules are VERY BUSY in September and October so schedule well in advance!
- Provide an **easily accessible location** such as a local social club/clubhouse, a popular community venue, Senior Center, community college, etc.

Invitations

- **Invite ALL candidates for State Representative and State Senator in your town/city**
- **Mail invitations** to local candidates – take advantage of your group's artistic talents!
- Invite legislators and community stakeholders **3-4 weeks in advance with a deadline to RSVP**
- Make **follow up calls 1-2 weeks in advance** – mention candidates who have confirmed their attendance in order to increase incentive to attend your event

Agenda and Structure

- Plan the event to last approximately **1 ½ to 2 hours**
- **Serve light refreshments** such as coffee/tea/juice/water and light snacks to match time of day
- **COLLABORATE** with like-minded groups/programs such as a local clubhouse, group/agency (FAVOR, Families United, NAMI affiliate, the Reaching Home Campaign, etc.) – KTP can assist with this
- **Focus on 2 – 3 key issues** for the 2011 Legislative Session – KTP can provide fact sheets
- Follow a **structured agenda** (have **2 – 3 people prepared** to briefly humanize key issues with personal experiences) – make sure to include specific “asks”
- Ask an effective speaker from your group to **moderate the forum**
- **Ask Candidates a few brief, but specific questions** that you have prepared and distributed to them ahead of time along with facts/resources/websites – KTP can assist with this
- **Be polite and courteous**
- **Distribute materials**, such as the Keep the Promise 2011 agenda and fact sheets correlating to the items you're highlighting (ask KTP to provide these) and any other key materials in a take-home folder
- **Allow equal time for the legislator(s) to respond** to the issues that have been outlined for them – **have someone serve as a timer**
- **Allow time for attendees to speak with the candidates** either formally or informally
- **Always thank your legislators** for attending while at the event and send them a thank you note and reinforce your issues and “asks” after the event

RULES FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS: 501(c) (3) organizations must not favor or oppose any political campaign of any candidate in public office, including when preparing for and executing candidate forums.

TURN OVER FOR RULES 501(c) (3)s MUST FOLLOW.

Keep the Promise Coalition can support you and your group by providing fact sheets, Blue Ribbon pins, and assistance with event planning and implementation. They can also attend and/or help facilitate the event.

Cheri Bragg, Coordinator
Maura Sheil-Hughes, Asst. Coordinator

keepthepromise@namict.org
ktpassistant@namict.org

(800) 215-3021 x 30
(800) 215-3021 x 32

501(c) (3) Organizational DON'Ts:

- Favor or oppose any candidate.
- Publish voting records during a campaign.
- Contribute money to a campaign as an organization.
- Circulate a candidate's statement to the media, general public, or members of your organization until after the election.

501(c) (3) Organizational DOs:

- Invite ALL candidates for each office to a meeting or public forum sponsored by their organization—as long as ALL candidates for each office are invited in the same format.
- Distribute any issue briefs or position papers to ALL candidates.
- Remain even-handed in all aspects of promoting and holding a meeting or public forum.
- Give equal opportunity to each candidate to answer all the questions put out by your organization.
- Have an impartial moderator.

This is a partial list of rules

For more information, go to www.nonprofitvote.org