

Creating Candidates Forums, Questionnaires, and Voter Guides

Educating voters about where every candidate stands on various issues is an important community service that NCJW sections can provide. As a result of our status as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, it is essential that NCJW plan candidates forums and craft questionnaires and voter guides with the utmost care. Here is a guide to how to undertake this important voter education.

Planning Candidates Forums

Candidate forums provide an excellent opportunity for constituents to hear the views of candidates running for office. For the candidate, such events provide a chance to address the concerns of a community in a fair and open setting. Holding a forum shows the candidates that community members care about the issues and want to be informed voters. It also demonstrates that NCJW cares about educating voters. Candidates forums should be viewed as a great opportunity to work with other organizations, raise your section's profile with the media, recruit new members, keep current members engaged, and most of all, help to inform voters.

Do:

- ▶ Invite all viable candidates for an office. Even if all are invited, there is a risk that the event could appear partisan if some candidates refuse to participate. If only one candidate agrees to attend, you should cancel the forum.
- ▶ Pick an accessible and neutral location – the location must not be selected for political reasons.
- ▶ Use an independent moderator so that the rules of the forum don't favor any one candidate over another.
- ▶ Compile a list of fair questions. Questions should address a broad range of issues and should not suggest the response the forum sponsor prefers. Questions should not be selected to show particular candidates in a better or worse light. (This doesn't mean they can't be controversial, but it does mean you might want to consult with other 501(c)(3) organizations to ensure your questions are broad and unbiased.)

Don't:

- ▶ Invite only the candidates with whom you agree.
- ▶ Select a location designed to intimidate a particular candidate.
- ▶ Indicate support for or opposition to a particular candidate.
- ▶ Use the forum as a political fundraiser or allow others to do so.
- ▶ Give any indication of NCJW's views on issues so as not to prejudice the forum.

Crafting Candidates Questionnaires

Like the candidates forum, the candidates questionnaire is a valuable tool to help ensure that the NCJW membership, as well as the general community, is informed about the views of those running for office. A questionnaire, which must cover a broad range of issues that candidates would address if elected, provides an opportunity for all candidates to make their positions known.

Do:

- ▶ Invite all candidates, regardless of party affiliation, to complete the questionnaire.
- ▶ Include a deadline for completion of the questionnaire, maximum word count for answers, information about where candidates should send responses, and an explanation of how the questionnaire will be used i.e. printed in a local newspaper, online, or in an NCJW section bulletin.

- ▶ Verify that all candidates have received the questionnaire and provide a reasonable amount of time for them to respond.
- ▶ Compile a list of neutral, unbiased questions on a variety of issues. NCJW resolutions are a useful tool in selecting issues your questionnaire will address.
- ▶ Print answers in their entirety unless they exceed the previously established word limit.
- ▶ List all candidates and indicate if he or she did not respond to the questionnaire or to a particular question.

Don't:

- ▶ Include only the candidates with whom you agree.
- ▶ Write biased questions that reflect approval or disapproval of a particular candidate's position or give a hint as to NCJW's bias.
- ▶ Highlight any one question or the response of any one candidate.
- ▶ Ask only yes or no questions without allowing for an explanation.
- ▶ Compare candidates' positions to NCJW's positions on the issues or state NCJW's position anywhere near where the questionnaire will be published.

Writing an Informative Voter Guide

A voter guide is a voter education tool that offers a “one-stop-shop” for information about how every candidate stands on various issues. By compiling voting histories, responses from a candidate questionnaire, and candidate position statements in one place, the voter guide is a great way to educate the public and makes it easy for voters to compare candidates' positions on important issues.

Do:

- ▶ Include all viable candidates' positions, regardless of party affiliation.
- ▶ Cover a broad range of issues that the candidates would address if elected.
- ▶ Describe the issues using unbiased, neutral language that does not hint at NCJW's positions.
- ▶ Use only positions that are in the candidates' own words in response to a question or are described in a neutral, unbiased, and complete manner.

Don't:

- ▶ Include only the candidates with whom you agree.
- ▶ Highlight only a narrow set of issues.
- ▶ Use biased language to describe the issues or the candidates' responses.
- ▶ Edit candidates' statements.
- ▶ Compare candidates' positions to NCJW's positions on the issues or put NCJW's positions anywhere in the guide.