

Legislative Candidates Forum Toolkit

This toolkit contains materials to help VLCT members host and publicize a public forum in which candidates for the state legislature can be heard by and hear from local officials and residents of the legislative district. This toolkit includes:

- Tips to plan, publicize, and run the forum
- Downloadable documents to customize:
 - Forum Agenda
 - Letter of Invitation to Candidates
 - Sample Press Release
 - Sample Questions

Plan Your Forum

- Invite the clerk, treasurer, school board, planning commission, recreation committee, equity committee, and other local boards or commissions to co-host the meeting. Consider joining with neighboring towns for a multi-town forum.
- Invite a member of the local news media, your town moderator, or a respected and experienced citizen to moderate. Make sure the moderator knows that they are managing the forum and therefore not participating in any debate or argument that may ensue.
- The chair of the selectboard or city council should act as the host and express both the importance of a strong partnership between local government and legislators and the willingness to be available to serve as a resource on local government issues.
- Invite the candidates.
- Decide what questions to ask the candidates. Sample questions are included in this toolkit. Consider providing questions to all candidates ahead of time so they may prepare their answers.
- Confirm the key attendees before announcing the forum to the public.

Ways to Publicize the Forum

- Download and edit the press release template linked below, then send it to all of the news media that report on your community.
- Post about the forum on your website, Facebook, Twitter, a local listserve, Front Porch Forum, and any other social media your town uses!

How to Run the Forum

- Introduce candidates and the moderator. Ask local officials to introduce themselves. If there is no moderator, the chair should moderate.
- Have prepared questions available to ask each candidate. Inform candidates that they will have a specific amount of time (2-3 minutes) to answer a question, and there will be time for further discussion at the end of the meeting. The chair may want to assign board or commission members to ask some of those specific questions.
- If possible and the forum is in person, arrange chairs in a semi-circle with candidates and moderator in front and on the same level as the audience. This encourages dialogue. If the forum is hybrid or virtual, provide for the widest range of view of the candidates and moderator.
- Allow time for audience members to ask questions. If the meeting is hybrid, this may include someone assigned to read questions from the chat or to recognize virtual attendees. You may want to suggest that the discussion continue outside the forum if the topic is specific to a small group of people or if time is running short.
- End the meeting at the announced time to respect everyone's expectations.
- Refreshments are good to have at in-person meetings.

If you have any questions about hosting a candidate forum, please contact Karen Horn (khorn@vlct.org). We are happy to provide whatever assistance we can, and we look forward to hearing the results of your candidate forum!

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