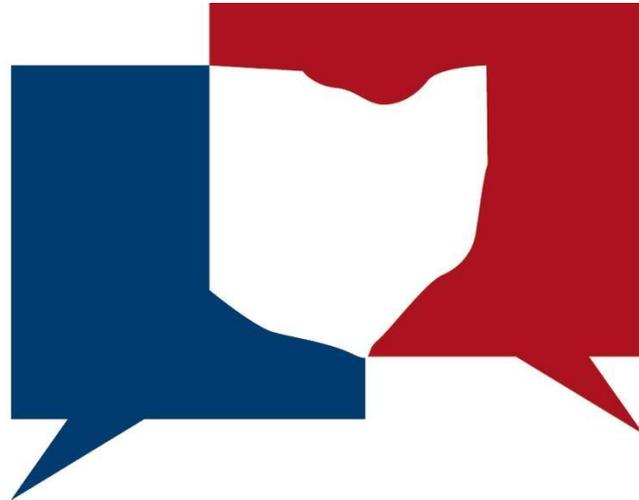


Debate Playbook 2021



**OHIO DEBATE
COMMISSION**

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Introduction

In 2018, after many electoral cycles spent working with campaigns and political parties to organize debates, more than 55 leaders from media, academia and civic organizations gathered from across Ohio to address a glaring need: when it comes to debates, there is no agreed-upon authority, no shared sense of what best practices are, and no clear idea as to what debates ought to look like or strive to accomplish. In practice, this lack of accountability leaves organizations unprepared for the responsibility and unfamiliar with presenting high quality political debates.

They joined together and formed the Ohio Debate Commission (ODC), a collaborative whose goal is to convene debates of the highest quality for the highest offices in Ohio. The ODC believes well-managed debates play a critical role in informing citizens about the issues and candidates on the ballot, and that debates ought to be worthy of the sacrifice public service and candidacy represents. We seek to mobilize an informed and empowered electorate, and honor the work of those who step up to run for office.

From the start, we imagined documenting our work with the goal of sharing it. We are grateful to the Cleveland Foundation's generous financial support that is helping us adapt and share this playbook as a guide to Ohioans and others who take on the goal of planning a debate between candidates. We hope this guide offers details and insights for the best case scenario and timeline for planning debates in a municipal election cycle.

This playbook is meant to be consulted by nonprofit organizations they approach or are in each phase, and should be reviewed as far in advance as possible. Candidates who run for office learn that there are three main resources: time, people, and funds. Only time can't be replenished, and this adage applies the same to debate planning.

We would also like to give credit to the statewide debate commission that started before us and whose work has greatly influenced us, Indiana Debate Commission, the Utah Debate Commission, and the Washington State Debate Coalition.

We strove to make this playbook complete and exhaustive, but there may still be things we missed--if there are, please let us know. That being said, please do not let the length of this intimidate you. What you want to do is important and doable, and your neighbors--and democracy--depend on it! The Ohio Debate Commission will continue to be a resource for anyone looking to put on a debate and we look forward to hearing from you - and seeing how you've highlighted your local candidates.

Jill Zimon
Executive Director

Dan Moulthrop
CEO The City Club of Cleveland
Board President, Ohio Debate Commission

The information contained in this playbook is for informational purposes only. It is not a substitute for expert legal, tax, or other professional advice that can address your individual circumstances. It should not be relied upon in an effort to avoid penalties related to the Internal Revenue Code, or rules of the Federal Election Commission or Federal Communications Commission.

Getting Organized For A Debate

1. What is a Debate
2. Select Races, When, and Where
3. Budgeting and Funding
4. Hosts, Partners, Committees, and Volunteers

In the appendix, you will find an [Initial Planning Worksheet](#) and a [Week by Week Worksheet](#). The first worksheet will help you answer basic questions to clarify whether putting on a debate is the commitment you want to make. The Week by Week Worksheet will keep you on track during the days and weeks leading up to the debate.

1. What is a Debate?

This guide is specific to candidate debates, as opposed to forums, meet and greets, or round robin/speed dating events. A candidate debate involves two or more candidates who seek the same elected office and appear concurrently. The candidates interact with a moderator, a panel, or possibly live or videotaped audience members, and are given time to respond to each other's answers. The candidates may interact with each other depending on the rules. The debate should be staged in a way that does not promote or advance one candidate over another.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Forum: Multiple candidates, more scripted, little to no candidate back and forth, easier to control.

Debate: Has at least two candidates, some back and forth, candidates can respond to each other, moderators more engaged.

Meet & Greet: Informal gathering during which multiple candidates are introduced, and may take questions on issues and legislation. Rules vary between local or state races, and federal races.

Speed Dating: Small groups in brief discussion with individual candidates, one at a time, with candidates rotating between tables at set intervals. Learn more [here](#).

As you prepare to plan your debate, especially if you have reason to believe only one candidate will accept, seek advice regarding rules of the Federal Election Commission (FEC), Federal Communications Commission (FCC, broadcasting), and Internal Revenue Service (IRS). [The Rules of the Game](#) is a guide put out by the Alliance for Justice. It provides an excellent review of federal tax law (IRS) and election rules (FEC) which govern nonprofit organizations related to potential election year activities.

WHAT'S THE CONCERN?

IRS 501(c)(3) (federal tax code): You do not want to jeopardize your tax-exempt status which prohibits you from activities that could be construed as campaign intervention. These rules apply regardless of whether you're hosting federal, state or local candidates. See *Election Year Issues* by Judith Kindell and John Francis Reilly (2002).

FEC (federal election rules): These rules apply if you're hosting federal candidates (US Senate or Congressional). See 11 CFR Sections 110.13 and 114.

FCC: (federal communications rules): When programming relates to candidates for elected office, broadcasters must adhere to rules crafted around the principle of "equal time" and the Fairness

Doctrine. See 47 U.S. Code Section 315.

[The League of Women Voters' FAQ'S: League Candidate Forums and Debates](#) is a useful Q&A on these rules.

2. Select Races, Dates, Locations, and Venues

Which Election Contest

Your first decisions will be about which race or races to cover, and whether you will cover primary election races, general election races or both. You will need to research what and who will be on the ballot. The best place to start this research is your county board of election. Contact information for all Ohio boards of elections (BOE) can be found on the Ohio Secretary of State website [here](#).

The quantity of information on a BOE's website varies from county to county but even before candidates start filing, the BOEs can tell you which races will be on the ballot and their filing deadlines. Be prepared to call the BOE and ask for 1) the candidates list to see all races and candidates who have filed so far and 2) the filing deadline for the candidates, which can vary from one city, township or village to another. You should also ask the BOE for the candidates list with their addresses and phone numbers on it, then start a spreadsheet of candidate contact information where you can also keep track of your contacts with the candidate. Depending on your community, you may consider reaching out to the partisan parties and current elected officials to learn which races are likely to be contested. Check the website for the state office of the political party for local party contacts.

As you view and narrow down the races you might cover, you will want to determine whether the seat is open (where there is no incumbent running for re-election), has challengers to the incumbent, or is what is called an uncontested race (because the candidate is running without a challenger)? Debates are for when the seat is open and contested, or when an incumbent has one or more challengers.

Multiple debates for any one seat are desirable, so do not worry if other collaborations form to offer up such opportunities, although do keep track of their plans to avoid scheduling conflicts. Additional debates allow for variety in format as well as ensuring more voters have a chance to engage, and more topics can be covered. However for some regions and races, organizing for one debate, and getting candidates for one may be more than what is usually done or expected.

When to Hold Your Debate

In Ohio, early voting begins 28 days before election day. So the first two dates you want to consider as you consider scheduling options for your event will be election day, and the first day when the board of elections mails out vote by mail ballots in order to find a date that will maximize voter engagement and be practical since you may have limited time for pulling together the debate.

If possible, set two to three weeks as your target timeframe, preferably before the start of vote by mail voting.

While it's important not to feel beholden to any one candidate, you do need to be mindful of scheduling realities in order to reduce conflicts that could lead to candidates not participating. Examples include:

- Regularly scheduled meetings for the elected position involved, i.e., look up when city council meets (or school board, or township trustees)
- Sports schedules for the relevant high schools and universities
- Religious holiday calendars

-
- Other large-scale community events

This partial list shows why starting your planning as early as possible is key, and will also give you a great benchmark from the municipal cycle for any future election cycle when you will want to put on debates again.

Where to Hold Your Debate

Location refers to the village, town, city, or county where you will host your debate. Venue is the facility where the debate will be held. Depending on the size of the group hosting the debate, it may make sense to pick the location together and then have a committee identify, check out and then recommend venues to the whole group.

Location

Location considerations include:

- Is it central to the intended audience?
- Is it central to the candidates?
- Does it have a variety of venue options (i.e., theaters schools, libraries, conference space, community centers)?
- How easy or hard is it to access by public transportation?
- Does it have any special significance to the election?
- Will the location increase or decrease your costs or costs to the intended audience?
- Are there geographic areas of the seat that get overlooked and deserve attention?

Venue

You will want to start your search for venues as soon as possible. If you are doing debates for a November general election race, then you're planning for them to be in September or early October. Plan on visiting venues in April, or six months in advance. If your debate will be for a May primary and will be scheduled in February or March, visit venues in October of the prior year. For March primary elections, you will be scheduling a debate for January or early February and should look into venues in August.

Venues can be libraries, colleges, local schools, community centers, senior centers, arts centers, theaters, and churches. We've provided [detailed site survey checklists](#) to help you figure out which venues will work best for your event, but some of the factors include:

- Audience size
- Budget
- Availability
- Perceived as nonpartisan
- Where other debates may be held
- Will you need to rent equipment like microphones, tables, chairs, podiums, audio and sound equipment, filming equipment, or will the venue supply, and at what cost
- What does the staging look like (i.e., is there a raised platform, is there space for a sign language interpreter)
- Parking availability and access
- ADA compliance
- Centrality of location

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- Security
 - Availability for rehearsal
 - Wi-fi
 - Supplier Diversity -- does venue/business practice ethical DEI standards
 - Restrooms -- quantity and accessibility

Do not limit your event to the venues familiar to you or ones you have used in the past. While there are reasons why venues are used repeatedly, the [site survey checklist](#) in the appendix can be shared with venues so they understand what needs to be considered if they'd like to be a debate venue. You also can create an online submission form to be completed by possible venues that will submit it to you for consideration. Then, you can conduct in-person site visits before selecting venues.

Virtual

In-person debates may not be feasible and you may decide to move your debate to a virtual space such as Facebook Live or Zoom. Tips for using Facebook Live can be found [here](#) and tips for Zoom best practices can be found [here](#). Another option might be a hybrid model in which you livestream an event that is in-person but without an audience.

Additional considerations with a virtual debate will include:

- selection of a platform (Zoom, Webex, Facebook, etc.),
- communicating with candidates about technical requirements for virtual platforms, computer cameras, audio etc. and
- potentially finding a community partner--like a library--that already has a virtual platform and expertise in handling last minute technical issues.

[This technical guide](#), used for a virtual event with the Ohio Supreme Court candidates, provides tips to the participants on most if not all relevant technical aspects.

3. Budgeting and Funding

Cost is one reason to work with other organizations and have volunteers since debates are not inexpensive. Review the [blank sample budget sheet](#) to get an idea of possible expenses; the most costly items include facility rentals, security, equipment, and publicizing. Event insurance may arise as a need that should be discussed with your organization's leadership. It can be covered by your organization, a co-host, or the venue.

To figure out your budget:

1. Determine how much money you have available from your organization, your partners, and co-hosts.
2. Determine what needs might be met through in-kind donations, meaning they are gifted to the effort (like the use of a facility) or provided pro bono (like an IT person's services).
3. Figure out what elements are not covered by the funds you have and the in-kind contributions you have procured.

The number left is how much you need.

To make up the difference:

1. Consider which elements you can forego or substitute with a less expensive alternative.
2. Continue to work with partners, co-hosts, and venues when it comes to what they can cover.
3. Reach out to local philanthropies that have supported voter education efforts in the past, or whose mission aligns with your goal of educating voters.

4. Hosts, Partners, Committees, and Volunteers

Hosts

A host is the entity in charge of the event. A host may or may not be the same as the location (site or city) or venue (the facility in which the debate will take place). If you are planning the debate, you are the host. The venue or facility may be a co-host in addition to being where the event will occur, but calling the venue a co-host implies they have taken on additional responsibilities, beyond being the venue, alongside you.

Partners

Partners might be interested in co-hosting your debate or spreading the word to their constituents and through their networks. Having partners can lighten the load on your organization's responsibilities while also helping you reach more voters to be debate attendees. **Sponsors** are partners whose primary role is to provide financial support.

Consider who you want to partner with - what organizations are likely or desirable partners, for purposes of putting on the debate and getting the word out, making sure voters know about it and covering it as a news story.

Pro-Tip: Once you've begun to develop relationships, consider using online virtual tools such as Google Drive to keep and share documents. You can sign up for Free Conference Call (website address) and there are multiple Zoom or Facetime-like platforms for virtual meetings.

Partners and co-hosts can lend credibility to your event. They should be not partisan and do not endorse candidates. Exceptions might be if you are hosting a primary event and have both the local college Democrats and the college Republicans as co-hosts.¹

Keep track of agreements made with co-hosts and partners in order to stay abreast of who has agreed to be responsible for which elements of the event. You can do this through an email trail or a signed memorandum of understanding. This step applies regardless of whether the co-host or partner is another civic organization, media, library, or other type of group or individual.

Committees

Create committees if you have more than a few people organizing the event and be sure to identify people who will lead each one. Examples include an operations committee, an outreach committee, and a fundraising committee. Dividing the work up by committees helps get work done. A few, and definitely not all tasks to be handled by committee include:

- how you will pay for the costs (aka fundraising)

¹ During primary elections, you may have an event for only one party's candidates without running afoul of FEC or IRS rules so long as you have at least two candidates and follow all other requirements.

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- picking a location and a venue
 - establishing candidate invitation criteria
 - how you will do outreach to the community
 - how you will interact with a potential audience - whether virtual or in-person selection of your moderator(s) and/or panelists
 - candidate contact

Volunteers

Volunteers add vibrancy to an event, but need structure. Be sure to have a plan for what you would like them to do, and a person designated to oversee volunteers in that work. Volunteers can be college or high school students, or members of a senior's group. They can help with registration, publicity, and guiding people on the day of the event. If you will be having volunteers, either from your organization or others, be sure to designate a person to be in charge of the volunteers, including knowing who has signed up, training/expectations, and who is assigned to do what.

Planning The Debate

1. Debate Elements
2. Moderators and Panelists
3. Candidates
4. Audience and Questions
5. Working with the Venue
6. Publicity and Outreach

1. Debate Elements

The debate is about the candidate and the voter. You want to structure the debate to honor the former and empower the later. Depending on how you set up the event, you'll have opportunities before, during, and after your debate. You should reach out to candidates about plans for the debate as soon as you have set the date, time, and place. See the appendix for a [sample first contact email](#) that does this. You may provide the Memorandum of Understanding, which spells out nearly all the debate elements, once they have indicated an interest in participating but before they have signed on, in order to share with them the expectations.

We strongly recommend you determine debate elements in advance of speaking with the campaigns, and to treat your decisions as non-negotiable. It may be helpful to remind candidates and campaign personnel that everything you do, including how you put on the event, is to further your mission. This advice extended to dates, locations, and time, as well as format, moderators, tickets, and audience, among other aspects. The reason behind this stance is to neutralize the ability or likelihood of political campaigns and candidates using the existence or possibility of a debate as a political foil. By setting the basics and the tone of how the debate will unfold, you demonstrate the expectation that people who run for public office *will* debate in public. That said, use your best judgment as to which if any elements might be flexible as you interact with candidates with the goal of providing voters with meaningful information and treating all candidates and campaigns fairly.

I think there should be additional mention/discussion of how to handle candidates special needs or requests. From them not being tech savvy to having impairments, how to validate and address/accommodate should be incorporated.

The elements you will want to discuss, determine, and then list in the MOU include the following (you can [view the example MOU](#) in the appendix to get an idea of how this looks once all elements are decided). These details may be more than is needed for local debates and should vary to fit your event. For example, you do not have to describe whether candidates shake hands, but you certainly can if candidates ask to include such a specific detail. However, there may also be details you want to include that are not mentioned below. For example, debate or forum hosts typically disallow candidates to bring or distribute campaign materials anywhere in the venue. This element could be in your MOU if it's not stated clearly elsewhere.

Elements In The MOU

1. Name of Candidate
2. Venue name and address
3. Date and time
4. Duration of the debate
5. Audience:
 - a. Whether you will have a live audience
 - b. The size of audience
 - c. The number of seats allotted for the candidates and who will handle their tickets
 - d. Are general public tickets free
 - e. Person or organization responsible for ticket distribution
 - f. Method by which the public can get a ticket

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- g. Whether you will review the ticket requests for purposes of developing a diverse audience in terms of gender, ethnicity and geographic distribution, reflective of the region relevant to the race with a goal of being inclusive
6. Debate format
- a. Position of candidates:
 - i. Whether the candidates will be standing at a podium, sit at a table or another arrangement
 - ii. How the candidates are positioned compared to each other
 - b. Greeting:
 - i. Whether the candidates shake hands before the debate begins and after the debate ends
 - c. Opening and closing statements:
 - i. Length of opening statement
 - ii. Length of closing statement
 - d. Order of speaking:
 - i. Which candidate goes first for the opening statements, closing statements, and answering the first question (common methods are coin flip or draw)
 - e. Time keeping:
 - i. How to provide for a countdown clock
 - ii. Provision that the moderator will state a firm stop to a candidate in the event it is necessary²
 - f. Items allowed on podium/lectern (or table) with candidate:
 - i. What is allowed (usually only a paper, pad and pen)
 - ii. Whether the candidates can bring anything to the podium when they enter
 - iii. Whether candidates are allowed to have props or notes of any kind
 - iv. all cell phone and pager devices should be turned off during debates to maintain the integrity of the event
 - g. Questions*:
 - i. State who will be asking the questions (e.g., two moderators, panelists, the audience)
 - ii. State whether the audience will be invited to ask questions
 - iii. State whether, how and when you may have the general public residing in the area covered by the race submit questions prior to the debate
 - iv. State whether they'll be vetted by the your organization for fairness, relevance, and interest
 - v. State whether you might make use of pre-recorded video questions, questions submitted via social media during the debate and how those will be vetted and asked

**Be aware that the number of questions that can be asked will depend on the duration of the debate and the amount of time allotted for opening and closing statements, the asking of questions, the response to questions, rebuttals to questions, and the number of candidates.*
 - h. Questions to more than one candidate
 - i. Length of response by each (90 seconds is typical)

² This firm stop could include the muting of a candidate.

-
- ii. How to handle rebuttals if you choose to allow them: Not all debates allow rebuttals but one common element is that in the event of a direct mention of a candidate in a response, that candidate mentioned will be offered rebuttal time (usually of 30 seconds).
 - i. Questions to a single candidate
 - i. Length of response (90 seconds is typical)
 - ii. Length of time for the other candidates to respond if they would like (30 to 60 seconds is usual)
 - iii. How to handle rebuttal if you choose to allow them (in this scenario, the first candidate asked the question may offer a final response in 30 seconds)
 - j. Moderators:
 - i. Name your moderators, panelists or others who will be interacting with the candidates during the debate; include their bios at the end of the MOU
 - ii. We recommend making a state that the host organization(s) is dedicated to equal time and authentic engagement and that your moderators or panelists will ensure that the candidates are able to fully answer questions. This provision goes to the ability of the person who asked the question to follow up should a candidate not answer the question.
 - iii. Moderators will notify candidates of the last question
 - k. Audience etiquette [example of what you might include]:
 - i. Will be instructed to applaud only at the beginning and end of the debate.
 - ii. Will be advised that applause, cheers or other demonstrations during the debate will be strongly discouraged, at the discretion of the moderators.
 - iii. Will be informed that audience members are prohibited from bringing signs, wearing shirts with political messages, etc.
 - l. Camera shots [if you are broadcasting the debate]:
 - i. State what will and won't be included; examples include:
 - 1. may be of the moderator
 - 2. of a candidate while speaking
 - 3. of both candidates
 - 4. or of the audience when the candidates are not speaking
 - 5. There will be no reaction shots or wide shots of the audience while a candidate is speaking.
 - m. American Sign Language Interpreter: For in-person local debates, plan on researching, budgeting for and procuring an ASL interpreter. For virtual events and events that are broadcast, check on the capacity to provide closed captioning.
7. Venue logistics [include in MOU as needed for your debate]
- a. Accommodations:
 - i. State what space each candidate will be given for themselves and staff
 - ii. State what if any special requests you are fulfilling
 - b. Walkthroughs:
 - i. State that the candidates will be given time for a walkthrough of the setup
 - ii. Consider setting the date and time in advance and including here
 - c. Surrogates:
 - i. Whether you will allow candidate surrogates to participate in place of candidates

8. Copyright and Use of Content³:

- a. If you broadcast the debate, determine which host or partner will retain the copyright.
- b. Include a statement that both campaigns agree that they and any groups supporting the campaign will not use video or audio or images from the debate in any digital, broadcast, or print advertising. Understanding that campaigns may not be permitted to coordinate with PACs and other groups, all parties agree to operate in good faith. State that you and your co-hosts and partners strongly discourage the use of your content in political advertisements of any kind and that you seek to create the content for the benefit of the entire community. State that you and your co-hosts disallow any use of your organizations' names in future campaign materials that would suggest any endorsements from your organizations.

³ This section is in accordance with FCC regulations and to protect your nonpartisan status, in addition to being good practice. As a reminder, nothing in the guide should be construed as legal advice, which it's not, and if you have concerns or questions, please seek out an attorney.

2. Moderators and Panelists

A moderator is usually the person who opens and closes the debate and may or may not ask questions. A panelist is someone who asks questions of the candidates at the debate. There can also be a designated person to bring a microphone to audience members who will ask a question if that is an element of your debate format. You will work with the moderator and panelists to discuss the questions to be asked at the debate. They will help craft and draft the questions, and work with you on the timeline of the event as the MOU provides for the different debate elements.

To select moderators and panelists:

1. Ask the hosts, co-hosts and partners for suggestions.
2. Review those suggestions and narrow them down to your top three to five.
3. As you make final decisions, consider gender, age, race, length of time in and familiarity with community, stature in community, experience with moderating debates, and reputation for being nonpartisan and any other criteria you feel are important will result in a fair and substantive debate.

[This advice](#) from the Washington State Debate Coalition stresses the importance of moderator selection to the success of a debate:

The **quality of your moderator** can make or break a debate. Moderators with journalism experience are some of the best. Their job is to ask the tough questions and they know how to follow up. Plus, many journalists have experience with moderation. Ask yourselves, what journalists live in and/or cover the issues in your community? Consider neighborhood bloggers, columnists, editorial writers, news anchors, talk show hosts, etc.

Being able to recruit people from your community whom others in the community, including the candidates, recognize and respect will go a long way toward an informative and successful debate. Former elected officials, retired judges, lawyers, and someone from academia are all reasonable options.

Carve out time to spend with your moderator(s) and panelists if you have both. Familiarize them with the host organization and its mission, as well as the goals of the event. Review the MOU with them so they know which parameters were outlined for the candidates and will govern the flow of the event. Make sure to offer time for them to ask you any questions and understand expectations.

Moderators will develop a script to open and close the debate. The script will include reminders to the audience about etiquette, who is presenting the debate, a thank you to the facility for its assistance, a thank you to the candidates for participating, a description of how the questions were developed, and any other disclosures or statements appropriate to the specific event.

3. Candidates

Once you have set the race, date, and place for your debate, identify who on your team will be the primary contact with the candidates. Then, plan to reach out to the candidates to let them know what you are planning and that you would like to speak with them about participating. Use the contact information you gathered at the beginning of the planning process to call and email the candidate, campaign manager, and communications person. Confirm the spelling of the candidate's name and current title as well as who, from the campaign, will be your primary contact. When questions and concerns arise, you want to have one point of contact to avoid confusion that can come from layers of communication.

If you do not receive a response or are unable to communicate directly with the campaign of any candidate after a week or so of emailing and leaving a voicemail message, try to identify other people or organizations in your network or community who might be able to assist. This might be a member of the candidate's political party who might be willing to make a followup call, or a person who knows the candidate personally or professionally. This is usually only possible for the local candidate races. Be sure to document your contact efforts. If you use social media or other online tools, including a website, consider publicizing your event and your interest in having all candidates involved who meet your participation criteria (see below).

Invitations

Email the same invitation to each candidate individually. However, note that once all participants are confirmed, you will convey details to them collectively so that everyone is getting the exact same communication. This approach cuts down on the likelihood of discrepancies in the information they're receiving. Be sure you are copying co-hosts in your correspondence and let them know about progress. [See the sample debate invitation in the appendix.](#) Follow up by phone within a week. Be sure you start this process well in advance of your debate date, especially since candidates often receive multiple debate invitations.

When you call, you may find it helpful to write out what you will say. You should include who you are, the organization or effort you represent, details about the debate including the date, time and place and that you are hoping for a verbal commitment to participate by a set date. If you are leaving a detailed voice message, you can let them know that you will follow up by email. Your decision to leave a detailed voicemail will be on a case-by-case basis but it is probably best to leave a simple voicemail and follow up with details through email.

You will not provide the proposed MOU with the email invitation. The debate elements should be outlined when you speak directly with the campaign and preferably if you are able to hold a virtual call when all the candidates can join you to discuss and agree upon the debate elements.

Once the candidate has agreed, obtain a signed copy of the MOU by the deadline you set. You can countersign that document and return it to the candidate. Acknowledgment in an email, as opposed to the signing of the MOU, is acceptable as well, but be certain that the MOU has been read and understood as governing how the debate will unfold.

For any number of reasons candidates may not say yes right away. As you work to figure out why and how to get to yes, consider working with your co-hosts and partners to publicize the value placed on

candidates facing each other and a fair, objective moderator in front of the public they hope will vote for them. If you have media outlets partnering with you, they may be willing to write about your event and expectation that candidates participate. Residents' letters to the editor suggesting that candidates face each other can also be persuasive.

Candidate Participation Guidelines

Criteria for eligibility should be tailored to the race and decided before invitations are sent out. This [sample candidate participation policy](#) covers the items below as well as other potential ways in which you might objectively and in a nonpartisan way provide for candidate participation.

The list below covers the basic eligibility elements that must be met by a candidate in order to participate in a debate. We strongly suggest that you seek legal advice if you have any concerns about their application. The candidate is expected to demonstrate compliance, but can be invited to the debate prior to meeting the elements so long as you indicate their participation is contingent on compliance. You can state that you will exercise good faith in applying the criteria as it is your hope to include all eligible candidates.

- The candidate is legally qualified to hold office.
- The candidate has correctly and properly filed all required documents and is in compliance with state law by the mandated deadline.
- In the case of a write-in candidacy, the candidate has publicly committed to seeking election by the write-in method.
- The candidate has provided evidence of a campaign such as:
 - has made a public announcement of an intention to run;
 - has a legally registered committee and has filed appropriate financial reports;
 - presence of a headquarters, campaign staff;
 - A website with policy statements;
 - Has made multiple campaign appearances;
 - Has been covered in the local media as a recognized candidate

We do not recommend the use of poll results for local debates given the unlikelihood of any being conducted. However, if you are planning a debate for a seat for which polls have been conducted previously, you can consider a criterion that has to do with poll results. You would want it to be an independent public opinion poll in which the candidate received at least 5% support.

Empty Chair

If any of the hosts are organizations with 501(c)(3) status, they must pay attention to the definition of a debate as being between two or more candidates. This is because tax exempt entities are prohibited from acting in a way that might be viewed as a contribution to a political candidate. If only one candidate participates, you will jeopardize the tax-exempt status of your organization because the event you put on with the one candidate could be interpreted as a political contribution. At the local level, it is inadvisable to go forward with a debate with only one candidate, even if a candidate pulls out after agreeing, and rescheduling is not feasible. If you anticipate being in such a situation, get legal advice before proceeding.

While the federal election rules include language indicating the FEC's desire to not penalize organizations that go forward with debates when circumstances are beyond their control, result in only one candidate available to participate, and it is not possible to reschedule, the definition of "beyond their control" is not clear and so empty chair debates are strongly discouraged. See [Federal Register Vol. 60 No. 240 \(p.64262 re: Debate Structure and Selection of Candidates\)](#)

4. Audience and Questions

Ticketing/Registration

Asking people to submit information in order to register for a ticket to the debate allows you to collect information that will help make sure your outreach leads to an audience reflective of the community served by the candidates. Platforms like Google Forms will allow you to create and launch such a tool, but other platforms exist and you should use what suits your event.

We recommend collecting information about gender, ethnicity and location because it helps you see which areas of a community may not be represented and inform your outreach. Include a note that states how the information being collected will be used and how it will be stored and handled.

Etiquette

The MOU spells out a number of expectations related to audience etiquette. They can include the following and you may think of more:

- Will be instructed to applaud only at the beginning and end of the debate.
- Will be advised that applause, cheers or other demonstrations during the debate will be strongly discouraged, at the discretion of the moderators.
- Will be informed that audience members are prohibited from bringing signs, wearing shirts with political messages, etc.
- Will be advised that
 - Cell phones may not be used during the debate and should be turned off
 - They are not to record the debate
 - Distribution of campaign materials is prohibited within the debate space

Questions

We recommend soliciting questions from the public and then having your moderator and panelists review them with a person from the debate host or co-host who can follow through on the vetting process. For example, the website platform (Squarespace) includes a module that allows the creation of a form through which people can submit questions online. Those submissions then populate a Google spreadsheet with all the information you want to collect about the person and the question so that you can follow up if necessary. This includes the situation in which you want to have a question asked directly by the person who submitted it. Be sure you are soliciting questions from local community groups that serve diverse populations so that your outreach goes beyond people who are tech savvy or have signed up to attend the debate in advance.

You should also provide an option for people to submit their questions as recorded on video. This can be done by providing a space for them to share a URL to a YouTube video or a place to upload a video.

You can publicize this opportunity for people to submit questions through your website, social media, your co-hosts and partners, and an event page on Facebook.

Depending on the format you've crafted, you may have audience members submit questions during the event on notecards, by Twitter, or by text to debate volunteers who can then provide them to the

moderators. This method of providing questions would be something to describe and agree to in the MOU.

5. Working with the Venue and Production

Once you've settled on a venue, create a written agreement with them if they do not provide one. Be sure all the elements you need are covered in the agreement, including fees you will have to pay and items they are going to cover (as an in-kind or because it's something they provide regularly). The [site survey checklists in the Appendix](#) will guide you. Be sure your venue contact is the person who can be responsive to your questions, or can give you the name of that person. The venue address and contact person information should go into your master contact list.

You likely will be in constant contact with the venue as you prepare for the debate. The following list is only a guide. You can adjust them as they fit your event. Consult the [Week by Week Worksheet](#) as well.

Tasks related to the venue and production to complete at least two to three weeks before the debate:

- Scheduling and conducting a walk through with the candidates if they want one
 - This will be when you make sure all the equipment, tables, chairs, tablecloths, etc. are available or will be
 - Make sure everyone - including the candidates and the moderators - understands how the timekeeper system will work. There are a variety of options for how to both track time and show the candidates where they are with their time. The silent options are less intrusive, whereas the audible options may be more effective but disruptive. Pick one, practice it, and make sure it works for your event's purposes. A few ideas:
 - hand held bells
 - pre-recorded sounds (soft chimes, loud buzzers, etc.)
 - "traffic lights" (green, amber and red lights) on a pedestal or other device
 - physical, computer-driven countdown clocks
 - colored placards (green, yellow and red) that can be held up for candidates and the live audience to see
- Make or have signage made for the following:
 - To help people recognize the venue once they are on the street
 - Show where to park
 - Where to enter the building
 - Where to sign in
 - Where they will be seated during the debate
 - Where the restroom facilities are
 - If you need signage for your organizations, get those ready
 - Name plates for the candidates if needed
- Make sure plans are set with the ASL interpreter.

6. Publicity and Outreach

Even though your debate may be on a local scale, you will still want to write and distribute press releases with announcements and information about the debate. [See this example of a press release in the Appendix.](#) You only want to issue press releases when you have news. Examples include:

- when you've set a date, time and place and have started communicating with candidates;
- when candidates have agreed to participate;
- when all candidates are now participating;
- when you have launched your online tools for people to register for a seat in the audience and to submit questions; a week before the debate.

Reach out to the media. You can learn more about who is a broadcaster, print or online outlet in your area by looking up online or contacting your state's association for print and online media or broadcasters. Advertisements are likely too expensive for your budget but social media, local community calendars, and hard copy flyers to schools, libraries, churches, retailers and other establishments in your community will help get out the information.

Be sure to invite the media to your event. Compose and send an email specifically to the media outlets or journalists you know and include the press release that announced the event. Depending on the size of the community related to the candidate's race, you may need to arrange for a media room where the press can sit to do their writing while watching the debate. Coordinate press needs ahead of time, then work with the venue on the arrangements. The press will appreciate your attention to their needs as they do their write-ups.

The Debate

1. Create an Event Day Timeline
2. Brief the Candidates
3. Check the Venue
4. Broadcast/Distribution

1. Create an Event Day Timeline

Make sure your [master contact list](#) that is shared with the campaigns and anyone assisting you with the debate is up-to-date. Those individuals will want an event clock, sometimes referred to as “run of show”, a document that can be as detailed as you need but which includes the time and the activity that will occur at that time, from before the event begins until all the events connected to it such as any post-debate opportunities with candidates and the media.

An [example event clock from a 2018 statewide debate is in the appendix](#). For local debates, you may work with a different time frame than reflected on the example, depending on how you have structured your event, so alter the timeline as needed. Perhaps your moderators arrive 15-30 minutes before the debate, with some candidates arriving half way through the event, especially if you are covering multiple races in one event. It is okay if your agenda for the day is more compressed.

Post-debate news availability, also sometimes called a "gaggle", is when the candidate takes questions, after the debate, from the media. These are often planned by the candidates, but the debate hosts help make sure there is a space to do them. This element may be one to add to your MOU, depending on the circumstances and interests of the candidates.

2. Brief the Candidates

Information to be discussed with the candidates just prior to the debate should be based on whatever was agreed to in the MOU. By the day of the debate, you will have done a tech rehearsal with the candidates and on the day of the debate, you are likely to do a walk-through. During these times, you should continue to check with them to make sure they understand how the debate will unfold. Other reminders for you and your co-hosts, partners and volunteers:

Candidates will not--and should not--receive questions in advance. You could choose to provide them with a topic list in advance, but doing so is by no means required or expected. This point might be one you can negotiate with little consequence.

Although the candidates will be reminded by the moderator at the start of the debate, you may consider re-issuing a cheat sheet of information about what is in the MOU, and highlight the expectations around timing - how long for opening and closing statements, how long for responses, whether there are rebuttals and how long those may be, etc.

Let the candidates know a timekeeper will be provided. The exact mechanism for keeping time will have been selected weeks before and gone over during their tech rehearsal and again during the run-through on the day of the debate. The candidates can be reminded that, if necessary, the moderator will interrupt a candidate to discontinue an answer if it has exceeded the allotted time.

The MOU should outline how the decision will be made regarding who goes first for opening and closing statements, and getting the first question. It is usually done by coin flip or a drawing but in either case, it should be done at the time of the tech rehearsal if possible, a couple of weeks in advance, so that there is no confusion of the day of the debate.

3. Check the Venue

Your MOU with the candidates and your agreement with the venue should continue to guide you in the debate approaches. Visit the venue yourself on the morning of the debate day and if your point of contact is available, check in to make sure there are no last minute surprises. Make sure your co-hosts, partners and volunteers are prepared with their responsibilities for the day whether it is coverage of the event, set up, helping with registration or directing people.

Then, at least three hours before the debate:

- If you have a press room, make sure it is set up for the media who will be attending.
- Conduct a tech check or rehearsal to make sure all audio, sound and other equipment is set up and works; use volunteers as stand-ins for the candidates
- If there are rooms where the candidates will gather with staff before and after the debates, make sure they are set up
- Set up registration tables and materials related to checking in attendees
- Check and make sure any arrangements you've made around security are set up
- Give welcoming remarks to the members of the press present. Be brief but clear in expressing gratitude for their participation, reinforcing house-keeping rules, and setting expectations for how the event will unfold and their role in it.

4. Broadcast and Distribution

Broadcast Television, Radio, Livestream through Facebook or YouTube

Arrange for radio broadcasts and television coverage if possible, in addition to coverage by news media outlets with print or online publications. EINPresswire provides [this list](#) of Ohio media outlets where you can find websites and from there, contact information, as well as a similar list for other states.

If there are nontraditional journalistic or other outlets for covering your event and extending its reach, connect with and include them on your distribution lists. One example is [Documenters.org](#), trained citizens who create, "...a new public record based on templated notes that can inform a range of civic actions." Learn more [here](#).

Your debate can reach voters who use the internet through your organization's Facebook page or YouTube Channel. This digital distribution will also create an archive that will continue to exist on the web and be viewable long after the event happens. However, keep in mind that as many as 340,000 Ohio households are without internet service.⁴ "The National Digital Inclusion Alliance, using census data, found Lorain, Cleveland, Youngstown and Dayton to be among the worst-connected U.S. cities of 50,000 people or more."⁵ This data means you should consider the size of your venue in terms of how many people can attend in person, and you should work through your networks, membership and community to publicize your event as broadly as possible.

Campaigns and Media

In the MOU, there is a section called, "Copyright and Use of Content." This section will apply if you or any of your partners or co-hosts broadcast the debate. It should spell out who will own the copyright for any broadcast that results from the debate. You will need to discuss this with your partners and co-hosts, especially if any of them are media entities. Debates for local elected offices can be in demand, especially if the seat is hotly contested. Therefore, it's best to be prepared for a wider audience and greater media interest than you might expect. When you provide them with their [media advisory document and press guidelines](#), you will include information about the appropriate attribution to your organization for the content, which they will need to provide with clips and other uses of the debate.

The section also has campaigns agree that "...they and any groups supporting the campaign will not use video or audio or images from the debate in any digital, broadcast, or print advertising." It is not uncommon to be contacted by one campaign regarding how a competing campaign uses or misuses video, audio, or images from a debate. Be sure to remind everyone of this element in the MOU.

⁴<https://www.clevescene.com/scene-and-heard/archives/2020/11/02/many-ohioans-lack-internet-access-to-participate-in-economy-schools-life>

⁵ Ibid.

After The Debate

1. Thank Yous and Finances
2. Metrics
3. Debrief

1. Thank Yous and Finances

Thank yous

Expect to have a lot of people and organizations to thank. You will want to prioritize these expressions of gratitude, especially after a debate for a local race because you want to be considered worthy of hosting and partnering again. There's no better way than being remembered for saying thanks, promptly. This step also is another reason to be sure you've been collecting contact information from the beginning.

These can be emails, but hand-written notes stand out. Your list should include:

- All candidates who participated
- The candidates' campaign managers, staff or volunteers with whom you interacted
- Your event's co-hosts, sponsors, partners, and volunteers
- Facility where you held the debate
- Any entities that provided you with financial or in-kind contributions
- If you thanked any of the above people or organizations before the debate happened, use the post-debate time to update them on how well the event went and let them know you look forward to working with them again

Finances

Make sure you've been keeping track of expenses and revenues. You can use an Excel spreadsheet or a Google spreadsheet. This record is important not only for knowing how much you spent overall, but also if co-hosts or partners have agreed to cover some portion of expenses and you need to settle up. In addition, you will gain an understanding of expenses and revenue so that you are prepared for future debates.

2. Metrics

By the time the debate is over, you are likely to have collected or have access to information about:

- people who wanted to attend,
- people who submitted questions,
- people who came to the debate,
- visits to your organization's website,
- number of tweets about your event
- number of media who covered your event
- number of news stories about your event
- number of co-hosts, sponsors, and partners you had

Gather this information and share it as a way to show voter interest in high-quality debates for local elected offices and the reach of your particular collaboration. Publicizing these metrics also helps candidates see the professionalism of your work and the seriousness with which you take having them spend time at your event.

In addition, you should create and send a simple survey (with a Google Form or if your organization has a newsletter, the platform may have a poll or survey tool) to attendees and ask about their experience:

- do they feel like they gained meaningful information,
- would they recommend attending or watching the debate to a friend,
- would they come to a future debate, and
- request their feedback through an open-ended question

The best time to gather this feedback is as soon after the debate as possible (because you want the respondents to have a good memory of the event and because you may not get to it if you don't do it soon after). This information will also be useful in gaining co-hosts, sponsors and partners in future election cycles, including those in 2022 for redistricted state legislative seats and congressional districts.

3. Debrief

Within a week to ten days of your event, hold a meeting with you, your co-hosts, other partners and important leaders to go over how the debate went. This meeting will be a time to review from the perspective of each person or organization how the event unfolded. The goal of the meeting is to hear from others about their experience, including the strengths and successes of the event, as well as any weaknesses. You want to encourage people that this is not a session to examine or determine blame for any negative incidents that may have occurred but rather to get as a complete picture as possible regarding how the debate came together in the end, and what you can learn from the one debate for future debates.

You may also want to schedule a session after the elections by which time you may have gained even more insight into the role your debate played in educating voters and having them feel ready to make a decision in an election. Candidate-to-candidate interaction has been on the decline and voters are losing opportunities to see and learn about candidates in a way no other event or interaction can offer. Applying what we learn from each debate we put on will ultimately help voters make the most informed decisions.

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AARP Ohio
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Akron Press Club
Bliss Institute of Applied Politics
Cincinnati.com
Cleveland.com
Cleveland VOTES
Classic Teleproductions
Columbus Metropolitan Club
Dayton Daily News
Dispatch Magazines
Gannett
Greater Cleveland Association of Black Journalists
Hannah News Service, Inc.
ideastream
John Glenn College of Public Affairs
Kiplinger Program for Public Affairs Journalism
League of Women Voters of Ohio
Miami University
NBC4 / WCMH Media Group
Ohio Association of Broadcasters
Ohio Fair Courts Alliance
Ohio News Media Foundation
Ohio Politics

Ohio University
Radio One
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Statehouse News Bureau, Ohio Public Radio and TV
The Blade, Toledo
The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation
The City Club of Cleveland
The Cleveland Foundation
The Columbus Dispatch
The Enquirer-Part of the USA Today Network
The George Gund Foundation
The Plain Dealer
WBNS
WHIO Radio
WHIO TV
WKSU-FM
WKYC-TV, Channel 3
WLWT Cincinnati
WOSU Public Media
WTOL
WXVU
WXIX
WYSU
Youngstown Vindicator
Your Voice Ohio

Appendices

Appendix A - Worksheets, Samples, and Examples

Appendix B - Other Resources

Appendix A - Worksheets, Samples, and Examples

Not all these documents will be necessary for every event. We encourage you to look through them as you plan and then determine which ones, edited for your circumstances, work best for you.

- Initial Planning Worksheet
- Week-by-Week Worksheet
- Site Survey Checklists
- Blank Budget Sheet
- Connection, Setup, And Equipment Guide And Tips For Virtual Forum
- Sample Master Contact List
- Sample First Contact Email with Candidate
- Memorandum of Understanding Sample Debate Invitation
- Sample Candidate Participation Policy
- Example of Press Release Announcing Debate
- Example of Event Clock
- Media Advisory Document and Press Guidelines

INITIAL PLANNING WORKSHEET

Before you decide to plan and put on a debate, consider these steps:

1. Identify which races are being held in your city or county and determine if any will have more than one candidate, regardless of whether one is an incumbent, also called a contested race.
 - If a race has a candidate who is unopposed, then a debate is not needed.
 - You might still want to have a meet and greet or a forum with the one candidate. This guidebook is for putting on debates.
 - For the contested races:
 - Which ones do you believe voters most need to learn about?
 - Do you think the candidates will participate?
 - Do you believe you could attract partners and volunteers to help?
 - If there are several contested races and you have to choose, which race seems most consequential to your community?
2. Do you have enough time to plan and put on a debate? The more time you have, the better odds you give your effort to succeed for the voters, the candidates, and the organizations involved. Although a debate can be pulled together in days or weeks depending on the community's size, we recommend starting at least several weeks in advance, if not months.
3. Is another organization already planning a debate?
 - If yes, would you like to partner with them or put on another debate?
 - Putting on an additional debate for the same race is good for the voters. Be sure to check on dates to prevent conflicts.
 - If yes, is there a contested race that does not yet have a debate scheduled and might you consider doing that one instead?
4. What budget can you afford?
 - Are you willing to ask for inkind contributions of space and equipment?
 - Are you willing to do fundraising if necessary?
 - Could you partner with other organizations that have experience, volunteers, interest, and ability to contribute either inkind or financially?

WEEK-BY-WEEK PLANNING WORKSHEET

The planning worksheet is a chronological list of things to do based on an eighteen-week schedule. Adjust this form to fit the particularities of your debate. You will adjust the number of weeks until Day One as suits your planning.

Every election has dates that are fixed, including filing deadlines and election day. Fill in the fixed dates, consider how far in advance of the election day you'd like to have the debate, then fill in the number of weeks between when you want to have the debate, and today - the first day of planning. No task is too small to include, so long as you are not underestimating what it will take to get the job done the way you'd like it to be done, with the results you want.

When you write it all out like this, it seems like a lot, but you will probably do almost every item on this list and more. Use a plan like this to keep yourself from being overwhelmed. Put them in one at a time, do them one at a time, and check them off one at a time. Categories of tasks include but are not limited to:

- campaign communications, for working with the campaigns to respond to any questions or concerns that arise;
- production team activities, including making sure all production needs get met (i.e., lighting, staging, any and all other equipment, personnel, broadcasting capabilities, etc.);
- venue-related specifics such as making sure the venue has all the necessary spaces and amenities including parking, catering, security, tech and audiovisual capacity for the media;
- all tasks related to moderators and panelists, ticket requests, question submission and selection, publicizing the debate;
- media credentialing and broadcast tasks even if you're using only virtual tools.

Week [Sixteen]

Review questions for planning debate

Research answers to questions for planning debate

Identify potential partners in staging a debate if you do

Date Done

Week [Fifteen]

Review answers for planning debate

Make a decision about staging a debate

If you decide to stage debate, start contact list

If you do not decide to stage a debate, consider next cycle

Date Done

[additional weeks]

...

...

Day One Date Done

Put up signage

Run tech check

[All other Day One tasks]

SITE SURVEY CHECKLISTS

1 - Basic information and contacts for each venue

Location (venue name)	Contact person	Email	Phone	Dates venue available	Seating	AV Available	Price	Other Notes

2 - Full-length site visit checklist

	Name of Venue 1	Name of Venue 2	Name of Venue 3
Parking			
# of spaces			
seats:spaces			
walking distance			
elderly/disability			
parking for media			
Security			
# for event			
internal vs external			
costs			
Power			
monitors, mic, etc.			
stage lighting			
Stage			
# of lecterns			
sound system			
ODC signage			
camera accommodations			
curtains			

types of lighting			
monitors for guests			
Wifi			
countdown timer			
ASL interpreter			
days ahead set-up			
tear down timeline			
set storage			
Labor			
ushers			
costs for staffing			
staff for tech			
Media			
media room			
Candidate Extras			
privacy			
bottled water			
food			
stools behind lecturns			
Public Participation			
projection screens			
how r screens arranged			
additional equipment rental			
facility assistance			
dry run 5 days in advance			

3 - Condensed site visit checklist including pros and cons review for post-site visit

Evaluation detail	Name of Venue 1	Name of Venue 2	Name of Venue 3
URL			

Pros			
Challenges			
Date Availability			
Location			
Contact Name			
Capacity			
Rooms Used			
General shape/ambience etc.			
Visited?			
Parking			
Security			
Power			
Stage			
Sound			
Lighting			
Labor			
Ticketing			
Media			
Candidate Extras			
Public Participation			
Tech Degree of Difficulty			
Cost			
Ease of Movement within Facility			
Loading dock ease, location			
Venue visit attendees			

CONNECTION, SETUP, AND EQUIPMENT GUIDE AND TIPS FOR VIRTUAL FORUM

This guide is for both your tech check the week before the forum, and for the evening of the forum itself. Please read thoroughly and contact Amy Cummings, Executive Producer, at xxx-xxx-xxxx, or Jill Zimon, ODC Executive Director, xxx-xxx-xxxx, with any questions well beforehand.

*Prior to the tech check on 9/29 or 10/1, your team needs to email Jill (jzimon@ohiodebatecommission.org) your Skype email address. The production team needs this information in order to connect you to the studio. See additional information below about Skype.

SHOW RECORDING DATE: Oct. 9, 2020
SHOW TOPIC: Ohio Supreme Court Judicial Candidate Forum
CHECK-IN TIME: 5:30 p.m.
RECORDING LOCATION: Remote via Skype

CONTINGENCY PLANNING: On your tech check night and on Friday, October 9, we request you be available precisely at the agreed upon check-in time for the studio to connect to you. (For 9/29 tech check, check in is 7:15pm; for 10/1 tech check, check in is 7:30pm.) If an emergency arises and you are not able to connect, please call or text one of these numbers at your earliest moment possible:

Classic Teleproductions: TBD
Amy Cummings, Executive Producer: [REDACTED]
Jill Zimon, ODC Executive Director:

The forum itself will be recorded from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. with questions being posed by moderators, Karen Kasler and Curtis Jackson. There is no audience. You will remain connected after the close of the program while the production team reviews the program to ensure its quality. We expect your commitment with the program to end at or before 7:30pm.

Connecting to the studio

- **The studio production people will be connecting to you via Skype.** If you do not have Skype on the device you'll be using or a Skype email to give us yet, please download Skype from the following link and share your Skype email with Jill as soon as you are setup (must be before 9/29): <https://www.skype.com/en/get-skype/> We strongly recommend familiarizing yourself with how to connect successfully using Skype.
- If you have any problems, contact Amy or Jill.

ATTIRE SUGGESTION: Please refrain from wearing anything with stripes, checkers or loud patterns. Otherwise, professional business attire is expected by our production team.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

- A laptop or desktop with working external webcam is best; otherwise the device's internal camera will be used. iPhone or Android with email access and a steady video shot are our second choice of device. If you have to use a mobile device, make sure it is set up to be landscape or horizontal. Close all unnecessary applications and silence your phone or switch it to airplane mode. We want to avoid any rings or notification pings.

-
- A strong internet connection. If possible, connect to your router with an Ethernet cable instead of using WiFi. If you are using WIFI, kindly ask other members of your household to please refrain from using the WIFI during our time together. If you want to test the speed of your internet, you can go to <https://www.speedtest.net/>
 - A recent version of Google Chrome or Firefox.

CAMERA PLACEMENT, LIGHTING & SOUND: Standard overhead room lighting is usually adequate. For time efficiency, it is critical that your camera is focused, and the microphone is tested with clear sound and no echo before we connect you to our control room.

Here are pro tips and best practices to participating in a television news program:

SET UP:

- Put your phone on Do Not Disturb. Turn off notifications on your computer.
- Close other windows and applications.
- Per the MOU, no props or notes of any kind will be allowed by the candidates.
- Only a paper, blank pad and pen shall be allowed adjacent to the candidate at the start of the forum.
- For your opening and closing statements, you may refer to or read from a printed copy of your remarks. As a reminder, the MOU relies on the honor system for compliance with its provisions and we appreciate your observance of them.

LIGHTING:

- Avoid distracting or reflective backgrounds like mirrors or windows (i.e., make sure there are no windows or lights in the camera frame behind you).
- Sit facing a source of natural light (like a window).
- To improve the lighting, you can purchase something like this ring light and position it above your computer's camera.

https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/1490917-REG/gvm_gvm_hd_14s_gvm_hd_14s_55w_bc.html

These are set up with a variable light setting for color and one for intensity. It will allow you to be lit with light that can match the existing light in your room.

- Supplement with a soft desk or table lamp you can move as needed.
- Please make sure you have a nice backdrop in your home or office with minimal distractions. A blank wall is preferred over a virtual backdrop. Check what's behind you in the video frame. Make sure it is clean and professional.

SOUND:

- Earbuds with a microphone will give you better quality sound than built-in computer or phone speakers. For wired earbuds, use just the one with the microphone, and hide the wires.
- Turn off sources of background noise, like A/C, fans and the TV.

ON CAMERA:

- Keep the camera level with your eyes so you are not looking up or down at the camera.

-
- Keep about one arm's length between your head and the camera.
 - Being centered in the frame is very important as you can see below. We may be cropping out the sides of your video in order to fit you in various configurations for the final program. In other words, we will be looking to make sure you fill the frame and are centered within it. You should make sure that you leave a bit of headroom at the top of the frame as well, but avoid too much blank space above your head by aligning your eyes about a third of the way from the top of the video frame.



“25 Tips for Better Video Calls”

Last, here's a comprehensive article of “do's and don'ts” from Crisis Communications professional, Bruce Hennes, [25 Tips for Better Video Calls](#).

BLANK BUDGET SHEET

DEBATE BUDGET	Description	Amount	Cash	In-kind	Total	Notes
DEBATE PRODUCTION REVENUES						
	Contributions from host organization					
	Contributions from co-hosts or partners					
	Sponsorships					
	Inkind					
	Individual contributions					
	TOTAL REVENUES					
DEBATE PRODUCTION EXPENSES						
SPACE RENTAL						
	Space rental subtotal					
EQUIPMENT AND STAGING						
	Room setup					
	Staging and drapery					
	Linens					
	Podium					
	Banners and backdrop					
	House sound/audio visual					
	Monitors, tech, tech support					
	Lighting					
	Equipment subtotal					
PRODUCTION STAFF						
	Housekeeping					
	Police Event Day duty					

Production Staff subtotal						
OTHER						
Mirrors, cords, lamps, TVs for candidates' rooms						
Registration table linens						
ASL Interpretation						
Debate supplies						
Host site administrative fees						
Catering for production and other personnel						
Crew parking						
Contingency						
Other subtotal						
TOTAL DEBATE PRODUCTION NON-STUDIO						

SAMPLE MASTER CONTACT LIST

[Your Organization]

[Your Event]

[Location and address of Event]

	Phone	Email	Specific responsibility area if one
Name of Your Organization			
Name of Person			
Name of Facility			
Name of Person			
Name of Candidate			
Name of Candidate's contact			
Name of Candidate			
Name of Candidate's contact			
[All additional people who might need to be reached: Tech, security, rentals, volunteers, media, parking, etc.]			

SAMPLE FIRST CONTACT WITH CANDIDATE/CAMPAIGN EMAIL

Date

Name/Title/Org
Address

Dear (candidate or campaign person):

Ohio is the heart of it all when it comes to elections, and the role of political debate has never been more necessary to our democratic process. With that in mind, I want to be sure you know about [name and description of your organization or set of organizations including that you are nonpartisan], and our plans for bringing candidates together for a debate this election cycle.

We would like to have time to talk with you more about our details and answer any questions you might have. Here are options for when I am available:

Thank you for your interest in serving Ohio and Ohioans. I look forward to hearing from you or the most appropriate person in your campaign and in the meantime, please do not hesitate to call me with any questions, concerns or comments.

Warm regards,

SAMPLE CANDIDATE INVITATION EMAIL

Dear [Candidate],

Thank you for being in conversation with [your organization] regarding plans for our debate for [race]. We are honored to extend this formal invitation for you to participate.

Here are the specific details:

What: Debate between candidates for [race]

When: [Day, Date, Time]

Where: [facility and address]

Duration: [length of debate]

Medium: [live; to be recorded; virtual;]

Moderators: [name(s) of moderators]

Questions: [state process for how questions will be crafted and who will be asking them]

The attached MOU includes these and all other debate details. Please return a signed copy to me by [date and time] to indicate your acceptance of this invitation to participate.

The event announcement for this debate is available on our website, [website link]. This is the language used in our publicity and by our partners.

Thank you for your service to Ohio and Ohioans and we look forward to working with you. Please don't hesitate to me with questions. My email address and phone number is below.

With gratitude,

Sincerely,

[Your organizer's name]

[Your organization]

[Your contact information]

SAMPLE CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION POLICY

For a Primary Election

This policy was established before inviting any candidate and was publicized in advance on our website, and by sending it to all candidates who are known to us and running for [race].

[Your organization] invites and seeks to include all qualified candidates who are legally qualified to be a candidate, have publicly announced the intention to run for the office, are qualified under applicable law to hold the office, have a campaign committee treasurer, and have qualified for a place on the ballot. In the case of a write-in candidate, the candidate has publicly committed to seeking election by the write-in method.

In addition, all candidates who meet the above qualifications, need to provide verifiable evidence of an active, formal campaign. Verifiable evidence of any 7 of the following 9 activities will meet this requirement:

- There is a staffed campaign headquarters.
- Supplies evidence of at least 3 instances of press coverage distributed to at least 10% of the race's eligible voters.
- Policy positions on at least 3 issues are available for the public to review.
- A campaign website exists with a biography, ability to contact the campaign by phone or email, and make donations.
- Social media presence on at least one platform, other than the campaign website, with more than 25 non-bot followers.
- Community engagement demonstrated by at least 12 campaign related events such as news conferences or neighborhood association meetings by the date of the debate.
- At least [x amount] in campaign contributions is reflected in the last filing statement prior to the Debate.
- At least [x number] of monetary contributions unrelated to the candidate's family are reported on the last filing statement prior to the Debate.
- Supplies evidence of print campaign literature delivered to at least 10% of the race's registered voters.

SAMPLE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Thank you for meeting with us on [date] to discuss participation in a debate, hosted by [your organization]. Our intent is to make this debate interesting and informative for the audience and viewers, as well as fair and equitable for the candidates. We will be as helpful as possible at every stage. We thank all the candidates and their campaign staff for your partnership.

The information below reflects the expectations and guidelines for the debate:

DETAILS

Participants: [name candidates]

Venue: [name, address]

Date and time:

Duration: [length of the debate; whether there will be any breaks]

Audience: [whether it will be a live audience; the expected size of the in-person audience; the expected virtual audience i.e., Facebook, YouTube, etc.]

Audience Tickets: [will they be free; who will be responsible for distribution]

FORMAT

Opening and closing statements: [length of time for each]

Order of speaking: A coin flip will be used to determine which candidate goes first for the opening, closing statements, and answering the first question.

Time keeping: A countdown clock will be provided with the moderator providing a firm stop in the event it is necessary. [if you will be using a different time keeping method, describe it here]

Items allowed on podium/lectern: A paper, pad and pen will be allowed on the podium. The candidates shall not bring already-constructed notes to the podium.

Questions: Questions will come from two moderators, who will also invite questions from the audience. The audience questions, while scripted, will all have been submitted by the general public of [locality], allowing for maximum engagement with constituents while maintaining fairness in the debate. These audience questions will be submitted prior to the debate and vetted by the commission for fairness, relevance, and interest. In addition to questions being asked from the live audience, the Commission may also make use of pre-recorded questions from voters around the state.

Candidates will have 90 seconds to respond to questions. In the event of a direct mention of a candidate in a response, that candidate will be offered rebuttal time, as appropriate.

Some questions will be addressed to a single candidate; some to both. In the event a question is addressed to a single candidate, the other candidate will have 60 seconds to respond, and the first candidate may offer a final response in 30 seconds.

Moderators: There will be two moderators for this debate. They will be selected by the [your organization] in consideration of any information shared by the campaigns with the [your organization] regarding moderators. [Your organization] is dedicated to equal time and authentic engagement. Therefore, our moderators will ensure that you are able to fully answer questions.

Audience etiquette: Audience members will be instructed to applaud only at the beginning and end of the debate. Applause, cheers or other demonstrations during the debate will be strongly discouraged, at the discretion of the moderators. Audience members will be prohibited from bringing signs, wearing shirts with political messages, etc.

Camera shots: Camera shots may be of the moderator, of a candidate while speaking, of both candidates, or of the audience when the candidates are not speaking. There will be no reaction shots or wide shots of the audience while a candidate is speaking.

Publicity: [Your organization] will write and issue a press release upon completion of debate details or at such a time as the [your organization] and the two major party candidates' campaigns agree.

VENUE LOGISTICS

Accommodations: [Your organization] will ensure the provision of one room for each candidates' campaign staff and one separate room for each candidate.

Walkthroughs: Upon completion of stage preparations including lighting, sets and any other preparations as deemed necessary by the production team, the candidates will be afforded time for a walkthrough of the set.

Copyright and Use of Content: Copyright will be retained by one of the commission members on behalf of [your organization or which ever partner/co-host you may designate]. The campaigns agree that they and any groups supporting the campaign will not use video or audio or images from the debate in any digital, broadcast, or print advertising. Understanding that campaigns may not be permitted to coordinate with PACs and other groups, all parties agree to operate in good faith. To be clear, [your organization] strongly discourages use of its content in political advertisements of any kind. We seek to create the content for the benefit of the entire community.

EXAMPLE OF PRESS RELEASE ANNOUNCING DEBATE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 5, 2018

CONTACT

Jill Zimon
440-544-6614
info@ohiodebatecommission.
org

Dan Moulthrop
216-548-6423
dmoulthrop@cityclub.org

CLEVELAND - The major party candidates for the office of U.S. Senator from the State of Ohio have agreed to participate in a debate organized by the Ohio Debate Commission. The debate between the incumbent, Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown, and his opponent, Republican Congressman Jim Renacci, will take place on Sunday, October 14, at the Idea Center® at Playhouse Square, 6 p.m. in the Westfield Insurance™ Studio Theatre.

Questions will come from each of two moderators, who will be announced later this month, and from members of the general public, who will be able to submit questions via YouTube and email from across the state. Questions will be selected and reviewed before the debate by a committee of Ohio Debate Commission members, and candidates will not be made aware of questions ahead of time.

“We helped to pull this debate commission together because we believe that better debates can help create the conditions for better elections,” said Dan Moulthrop, CEO of The City Club of Cleveland, a member of the Ohio Debate Commission. “With the network created by the members of this commission, we’ll be able to make sure everyone in every corner and community of the state has the opportunity to take full measure of both candidates before the November election.”

Information on getting tickets and submitting questions for the debate will be available at <https://ohiodebatecommission.org/faq/> by Monday, September 10, 2018.

The Ohio Debate Commission is a collaboration of civic organizations, media organizations, and universities working to create debates of the highest quality for the highest statewide offices and distributing that content to every corner of the state. The commission was founded in early 2018 and includes media entities in every market in Ohio.

SAMPLE EVENT CLOCK

	EVENT CLOCK FOR GUBERNATORIAL DEBATE, 10/8/18
Sunday October 7	
	Production truck arrives
	Setup
6:00 PM	Walk-thru (campaign staff, Amy, Joe, Mike and team, Jill)
Monday October 8	
	Sat truck arrives
9:00 AM	Access to rooms and wifi available
11:00	Production crew arrives
2:30	DeWine walk thru
3:30	Cordray walk thru
3:00	Moderators Karen Kasler, Jerry Revish and Jackie Borchardt arrive
4:00	Tech rehearsal/run-thru with everyone - use students as candidate stand-ins
4:00	Media credential, will call tickets and staff/volunteer tables in place
4:00	Event staff, volunteer badge pick up begins
4:30	Make-up artist Mariella Kaufman arrives
4:30	Test wi-fi signal in green rooms and working media room
5:00	Press credential sign in begins
5:00	Makeup for mods to start
5:00	TV production crew dinner break
5:00	ODC partners who have volunteer jobs arrive
5:15-5:35	Cordray press conference (ATRIUM)
5:00-5:45	Live shot availability of venue
5:30	Will call ticket distribution begins
5:55	Doors open to the public
6:00	Satellite window opens up
6:00	Candidates arrive, begin getting make-up (on their own)
6:25	House doors Close
6:25	State trooper security sweep
6:30	Candidates arrive backstage, get microphones on, last chance make-up

	review
6:35	Harlan Sands remarks (CSU pres)
6:40	Dan Moulthrop welcomes everyone
6:45	Moderators seated
6:50-55	Candidates seated
7:00	Debate broadcast begins
7:56:46	Debate broadcast ends
8:25	DeWine reports to post-debate news availability, 10 min availability
8:40	Cordray reports to post-debate news availability, 10 min availability

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY DOCUMENT AND PRESS GUIDELINES

[Name of Event]

Media Information

For [date]

[Event location and address]

Schedule Quick Reference

- 4pm — The Smith Studio opens. Credential pickup begins.
- 4-6 pm — Snacks and beverages available in the Smith Studio.
- 6pm – Debate starts. Media can watch from Smith Studio.
- 7:25-7:50pm – Post-debate interviews in Smith Studio.
- 9pm – Smith Studio closes.

Parking

- Building address is 1375 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44115. The name of the building is the Idea Center at Playhouse Square. The venue for the debate is the Westfield Insurance Studio Theatre.
- There are parking garages and surface lots throughout the Playhouse Square neighborhood. Please leave extra time because there is a Browns game Sunday afternoon as well as productions elsewhere in the theater district. Parking will be at a premium.

Staff contacts

[Name and cell phone numbers]

Credentials

- Credentials will be available for pickup at the Outcalt Lobby of ideastream, starting at 4 pm (First Floor).
 - You will need to show your photo ID to pick up credentials.
- Smith Studio and Media Room
- Open 4pm – 9pm.
 - Complimentary snacks and water available 4-6pm in Smith Studio.
 - The Wi-Fi network for media use is IdeaCenterGuest – no password needed.
 - Post-debate candidate availability in Smith Studio.
 - The candidates' sessions will be separate and last for ten (10) minutes.

Restrooms

- Media may use restrooms located underneath the main staircase on first floor.
- Live Feed and photographs of the Event
- The debate broadcast will be available in the Smith Studio.
 - A live-stream will be available on YouTube where embed code can also be obtained: [\[link\]](#)
 - A pool photographer will shoot for the first 10 minutes of the debate and will make photos available as soon as possible via this Dropbox link: [\[link\]](#)

Moderator information

[Name of Moderator] & [Bio of Moderator]

Appendix B - Other Resources

We found these resources useful in compiling a playbook for Ohio and encourage you to browse them when looking for additional guidance. All items in the list are hyperlinks to the resource on the internet except for the first item which is bookmarked as a document available within this playbook.

- [Alliance for Justice: The Rules of the Game: A Guide to Election Related Activity for 501\(c\)\(3\) Organizations](#)
- [Bolder Advocacy Hosting Candidate Debates](#)
- [Commission on Presidential Debates Guide to Hosting Your Own Debate](#)
- [National Democratic Institute: Organizing and Producing Candidate Debates](#)
- [Nonprofit VOTE Hosting a Candidate Forum](#)
- [Seattle CityClub Debate Toolkit](#)

In addition, the National Institute for Civil Discourse developed the following Standards of Conduct for Debates which may be helpful to consider as you create your event:

NICD STANDARDS OF CONDUCT FOR DEBATES

[The National Institute for Civil Discourse](#) created the following Standards of Conduct for Debates as a framework to model and revive the spirit of civility. They are intended as standards for all candidates for public office, including local candidates), as well as for moderators and the audience.

CANDIDATES:

- Be respectful of others in speech and behavior
- Answer the question being asked by the moderator
- Make ideas and feelings known without disrespecting others
- Take responsibility for past and present behavior, speech and actions
- Stand against incivility when faced with it

MODERATORS:

- Address uncivil behavior by naming it and moderating the conversation to move toward a more respectful dialogue
- Enforce debate rules equally
- Hold candidates accountable by challenging each candidate to speak the truth and act with integrity
- Treat all candidates equally in regards to the complexity of questions and debate rules
- Be respectful when interacting with candidates

AUDIENCE:

- Be respectful of other audience members, the candidates and moderators in speech and behavior
- Refrain from creating disturbances to other audience members, candidates and moderators
- Take responsibility for personal behavior, speech and actions
- Speak against incivility by reminding candidates it is not acceptable
- Practice active listening when someone else is speaking, seeking to understand them