

## ONLINE RESOURCES

<b>Name of Organization</b>	<b>Web site address</b>	<b>Types of Information, publications</b>
Advocacy Institute	<a href="http://www.advocacy.org">www.advocacy.org</a>	Research and policy in social justice, including publications on these and related issues
The Advocacy Project	<a href="http://www.advocacynet.org">www.advocacynet.org</a>	Advocacy issues around human rights, information on internship opportunities in human rights
Alliance for Justice	<a href="http://www.afj.org">www.afj.org</a>	Nonprofit election-year legal guidance, lobbying rules, legal/spending limits for nonprofit organizations, <i>"The Rules of the Game: An Election Year Legal Guide for Nonprofit Organizations."</i>
American Association	<a href="http://www.aauw.org">www.aauw.org</a>	Legal limitations for candidate forums, Legal Advocacy Fund of University Women Tool Kit
Center of the American Experiment	<a href="http://www.AmExp.org">www.AmExp.org</a>	Think-tank based in Minnesota, information on policy and advocacy issues, links to myriad additional resources
Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest	<a href="http://www.clpi.org">www.clpi.org</a>	D.C.-based organization promotes government accountability with information for nonprofit organizations on lobbying, also provides links to organizations with related information
Internal Revenue Service	<a href="http://www.irs.gov">www.irs.gov</a>	Tax laws and legal limitations on advocacy and lobbying for nonprofit organizations, 501(h) election, <i>"Compliance Guide for 501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Organizations,"</i> expenditure test for nonprofit organizations to follow
League of Women Voters	<a href="http://www.lwv.org">www.lwv.org</a>	Resources and information on a myriad of topics including elections, voting, candidates, campaign finance reform as well as links to the Minnesota League of Women Voters
Minnesota Participation Project/Minnesota Council of Nonprofits	<a href="http://www.mncn.org/mpp">www.mncn.org/mpp</a>	A wealth of materials and expertise on nonpartisan voter engagement for charitable 501(c)(3) organizations.
Minnesota House	<a href="http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us">www.house.leg.state.mn.us</a>	Contact information for all Minnesota representatives, district finders to locate your representative, committee assignments and key issues
Minnesota Senate	<a href="http://www.senate.leg.state.mn.us">www.senate.leg.state.mn.us</a>	Contact information for all Minnesota senators, district finders to locate your senators, committee assignments and key issues
OMB Watch	<a href="http://www.ombwatch.org">www.ombwatch.org</a>	Promotes government accountability, provides information on accountability issues and issues important to nonprofit organizations, also publications on projects to watch
United Nations Association of the United States of America	<a href="http://www.unausa.org">www.unausa.org</a>	Provides advocacy guide, including format ideas and legal limitations for candidate forums

# A NONPROFIT'S GUIDE TO HOSTING CANDIDATE FORUMS FOR ELECTIONS IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

A STEP-BY-STEP MANUAL ON PLANNING, POLITICS, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND THE LAW



**MINNESOTA PARTICIPATION PROJECT:**  
Nonpartisan Nonprofit Voter Mobilization

[WWW.MNCN.ORG/MPP](http://WWW.MNCN.ORG/MPP)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Selecting a Format	2
To-Do List on a Deadline	3-8
What the Politicians Want from a Candidate Forum	9
Some Minnesotan PR Advice on Publicizing Your Forum	10
What Not to Do in Planning a Forum	11
Looking for Some Help?	11
How You Can Get the Media to Make Your Forum Famous	12
Legal Limitations	13
Methodology	14
Your Quick Forum To-Do List	14
Online Resources for Nonprofits	.Back Cover

## INTRODUCTION: WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

Because a nonprofit plays a nonpartisan role in hosting candidate forums, it can frame such forums as essential opportunities for improving public understanding of the election process and vital societal issues. It can also frame them as rare but exceptionally important opportunities for local residents to participate in the democratic process.

This Minnesota guide is a tool for helping your nonprofit achieve its public policy goals. Whether your organization needs funding, has a goal of changing state law, or simply wants to increase awareness of its issues or its constituency, a candidate forum during a major election year is one of the most powerful tools for achieving those objectives. This guide will mainly assist those hosting a candidate forum in the upcoming election season, while highlighting Minnesota's relevant quirks and tendencies throughout. It was developed summarizing existing tools and enhanced through interviews with the Legislature, prominent journalists from around the state and a public relations expert.

In essence, hosting a successful forum hinges on one factor: planning. By following the guideposts set out in this publication, carefully developing plans and executing them, any nonprofit in Minnesota should be able to achieve its goal of successfully hosting a forum.

## YOUR QUICK FORUM TO-DO LIST

### BEFORE THE EVENT

#### 4 MONTHS:

- Collaborate with other local nonprofits
- Set date, time, and place for the event
- Decide on forum format
- Develop a forum budget and stick to it

#### 3 MONTHS:

- Send invitations to candidates
- Make preliminary media contact

#### 2 MONTHS:

- Begin volunteer recruitment
- Follow-up on candidate invites
- Consider possible moderators

#### 1 MONTH:

- Assign volunteers to tasks
- Final confirmation of candidates
- Hold a mock forum
- Reconfirm site arrangements
- Distribute promotional materials
- Remind media

#### LESS THAN 1 MONTH:

- Finalize selection of a moderator
- Finish volunteer recruitment
- Urge and promote audience attendance
- Final press release and contact
- Write op/ed piece
- Select a timekeeper

#### ON THE BIG DAY:

- Complete set-up at forum
- Designate volunteers to greet
- Set up a head table
- Remember to welcome everyone
- Review forum rules
- Have a Q&A after the forum

### AFTER THE EVENT

- Send thank-you letters
- Monitor news stories for accuracy
- Write op/ed piece

## METHODOLOGY: RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THIS GUIDE

This guide's design reflects an earnest desire by its authors to make already available material more accessible, more readable, and Minnesota-centric. The timeline, "how-to" section, and practical forum-hosting materials were gathered in a typical research fashion from various regional and national organizations. The comments on candidate forums come from elected politicians, Minnesota journalists and a public relations professional and were gathered through questionnaires. These comments were analyzed and included throughout this guide to ensure Minnesota nonprofits plan their forums paying particular attention to Minnesota's unique laws and characteristics.

## LEGAL LIMITATIONS

In planning your candidate forum, take these few legal precautions to ensure your forum runs smoothly and remains nonpartisan. The legal limitations are easy to follow, however some are a bit subjective. Use your best judgment and ask questions. If you are unsure about any aspect of your forum, ask a legal expert.<sup>1</sup>

### ENSURE YOUR CANDIDATE FORUM IS LEGAL AND NONPARTISAN THROUGH:

**Broadcasting:** If your forum will be broadcast, the broadcaster must meet the FCC guidelines for equal access to broadcast and cable airtime for the candidates, but only for those who entered into the race by the time of your forum.

**Candidate Appearances:** Have all viable candidates appear at your forum. You must invite all of them. If only one can attend, you MUST reconsider whether or not only one candidate's attendance would make the forum partisan.<sup>2</sup>

**Criteria for Candidates:** Establish criteria to govern which candidates are eligible to attend your forum. Consider using a consent form for candidate participation and having each sign it.

**Disability Access:** The Federal Disabilities Act requires your site to have disability access.

**Equal Opportunity Guarantee:** Provide equal opportunity and access to each candidate attending your forum. Each candidate should understand the format of your forum, especially if your format does NOT guarantee equal opportunity and access (see "Choosing the Forum's Format," page 2). Consider documenting this through a consent form that each candidate signs.

**Funding:** As long as your forum is education-

al, it is OK to use tax-exempt donations to fund your forum and/or debates. Everything from in-kind contributions of the site to the financial commitment of sponsoring organizations is included here.<sup>3</sup>

**Invitations:** You must invite all viable candidates (those who have filed) to your forum.

**Issue Coverage:** Nonprofits hosting candidate forums are required to cover a broad range of issues. Finding event co-sponsors who focus on different issue areas is important. Consider all the ways in which your primary issue crosses over into other issue areas. For example, you may host a forum on environmental issues that focuses on energy, transportation, land use, housing, recreation, etc.

**Literature:** Provide nonpartisan voter guides, registration and get-out-the-vote materials for your audience. Have more than one candidate's literature available, again to remain nonpartisan and show that your forum does not favor one candidate over another.

**Nonpartisanship:** You are required to refrain from engaging in partisanship.

**Site Selection — Neutrality:** Your candidate forum needs to be at a neutral site for candidates. Be mindful of the constituency surrounding the site. For example, do not hold candidate forums at an abortion clinic in a neighborhood that is strongly opposed to one party/candidate.

### FOOTNOTES

1. There are many great resources, including right here in Minnesota. The Minnesota Participation Project is a great place to start — see "Resources" at the back of this guide.

2. See "Additional Notes" below.

3. United Nations Association of the United States of America and the Business Council for the United Nations, UNA USA Advocacy Guide. <http://www.unausa.org>, April 12, 2004.

## AN ADDITIONAL NOTE ON CANCELING FORUMS

The Alliance for Justice has advice for you if you think you might need to cancel your forum: "You will have to cancel a forum if it's a two candidate race and one declines to attend (or worse) doesn't show up at all. The (regulations) are pretty clear there. Other than that, if it's a multi-candidate race and one or more doesn't show you will have to subjectively determine whether it looks like favoritism towards one candidate over another. If there is none, the forum may proceed. If not, you should cancel it.

"Invitation alone does not protect you ... (you) need to make sure that ultimately the debate/forum looks and feels strictly nonpartisan. If the absence of a major candidate makes it feel like there is an advantage for any candidate, you should cancel.

"(I) wish it had a brighter line rule, but that's what we're (unfortunately) stuck with."

## CHOOSING THE FORUM'S FORMAT

### Your first step in planning a forum

The first thing on your to-do list is selecting the format of your forum. When you decide, remember that it's important to select the option that meets the needs of your community. Remember: complex questions allow candidates to avoid answering controversial questions. Make certain questions are concise, clear and focus on a single concept. Do not ask candidates leading questions that point toward specific responses.

#### 1. Equal Time Q&A

Most often an impartial moderator and panelists are selected to question the candidates, who are then allowed equal time to respond. Traditionally, candidates are unaware of the exact questions but know the established focus of the program. Candidates may answer all the same questions or may be asked different questions, so long as each is given equal time to present his or her point of view.

#### 2. Prepared and Spontaneous DEBATE

Candidates are presented before the forum with several prepared questions constructed to elicit specific, detailed responses. A selection of these questions will be asked at the forum. In addition, candidates will be asked to give spontaneous answers to questions that originate with the panel, their opponents and/or the audience.

#### 3. Follow-up Q&A

The moderator and panelists ask the candidates questions. To avoid evasive answers, follow-

up questions are permitted. Follow-up questions by opponents force candidates to articulate their points of view.

#### 4. Discourse DEBATE

The moderator asks a question and the candidates discuss the issue. It is imperative that the moderator control candidates who try to dominate the discussion. A strong nonpartisan moderator is a must for this forum design.

#### 5. Town Meeting Q&A

Members of the audience ask all questions, but questions may be screened to avoid redundancy and to facilitate substantive questioning. Those asking questions will educate the candidate on the concerns of the constituency.

#### 6. Feedback/Hearings

Focus the forum on issues specific to your organization. For each of these issues, select an expert to present concerns and suggest solutions. After the expert presentation, the moderator or panelists will ask the candidates to respond with specific program proposals to remedy the concerns presented. Candidates will be allowed to make closing remarks after all agenda items have been discussed.

#### 7. ADDING ON INFORMAL Q&A

With any of these options, you can consider adding an informal question & answer session at the end of the formal proceedings.

# TO-DO LIST ON A DEADLINE

*in Minnesota*

## WITH FOUR MONTHS TO GO

**1. Collaborate with other nonprofits in your district.** Pay attention to being inclusive of other nonprofits when choosing co-sponsors. Co-sponsoring organizations are helpful in several ways: logistics, volunteers, turnout, name-recognition and more. Since nonprofit candidate forums must cover a broad swath of issues in order to maintain the nonpartisan nature of the event, co-sponsors are critical partners. Gauge the level of involvement from co-sponsor organizations: For example, will the co-sponsors help plan the forum or simply be recognized on press releases? Will they assist in getting their organization's members to attend the forum? Typically, candidate forums reach an audience broader than one organization's members and co-sponsorship is critical to help recruit participants. If the co-sponsors choose to be involved in planning, establish a planning committee with representatives from each co-sponsoring organization.

**2. Set date, time, and place for the forum.** The forum should be held during the middle of the week and in the evening to ensure attendees ample time to arrive after work/daytime commitments (it's best to start between 6 - 7:30 p.m.)

Keep in mind that many people rely on buses for transportation. Especially in the larger metro areas, it is important to ensure plenty of time after the work day for folks to arrive to the event. The forum location should be centrally located in the district and near a bus line for easy access. Be sure to ask the facility about safety requirements and adhere to them strictly. Also, make provisions for childcare at the forum.

Lastly, remember that Fridays are almost like holidays in Minnesota. Avoid hosting forums on Fridays and try not to plan forums that go late into Thursday night; it's often a social time. Also note that journalists covering the event often prefer earlier end times because of deadline restrictions.

**3. Decide on the forum's format.** See Page 2 for more details. Decide on time limits for each candidate's response; this will depend on how many candidates attend.

**4. Develop a budget for the forum** early and stick to it. Don't let costs get out of hand.

## HOW YOU CAN GET THE MEDIA TO MAKE YOUR FORUM FAMOUS

1. Get your information to the media early and always be aware of the media's deadlines and technical needs. There are always a lot of competing interests for the media, especially during election season. They need to be aware of your forum in advance. Ask for an event preview, event review, big-picture trends article, listing in an events calendar or an editorial. Ask about writing a letter to the editor or submitting an op-ed column. (See *Understanding Newspaper Jargon*, below).

2. In all conversations, prove to journalists that your forum represents a means of advancing the story of the election, the broader issues, and your nonprofit's story. Demonstrate time and again that your forum is newsworthy. Something about your forum represents a new development in the broader elections story.

3. For small nonprofits, attracting media attention can be a huge challenge. One strategy is to try and get your forum's story told as part of a larger, regional story on several forums. The media likes to be able to use a story in one place to highlight similar events throughout the region. Your organization should be aware of what other groups are doing. When you contact the media for coverage show that similar forums are happening in the region. Suggest they do a larger story on forums in the region, using yours as the keystone forum.

4. You need to contact editorial boards separately to run an op/ed piece. Personal contact is best. Editorial boards usually operate autonomously from the newsroom and if you want to run an editorial you should contact one of those editors personally.

5. Try to be one of the earlier forums in the election cycle, because you are more likely to entice the media to attend and cover your forum.

6. Demonstrate that your organization has broad public appeal. Partnering with other organizations will increase audience attendance and community buzz.

## UNDERSTANDING NEWSPAPER JARGON

Newspaper jargon doesn't always make sense, but you need to understand it to have an intelligent conversation with an editor. Here's a summary of the basics: An event preview is published prior the event. It details who will attend, what they'll discuss, why it's relevant to readers, how it fits in the relevant political context, and details about time and location of the event. An event preview will increase attendance of the event. An event review is an article published the day after the event. It includes everything in the event preview, but can give a more in-depth discussion of what happened at the event. Ask media groups to put your event in their events calendars or listings. Finally, some media organizations might be interested in doing a big-picture trends piece on the forums (see Number 3 above).

# TOP TEN LISTS FOR PLANNING

## WHAT NOT TO DO IN PLANNING A FORUM

1. Don't start planning publicity late.
2. Don't assume the public will attend. Remind and entice them constantly.
3. Don't forget to personally follow-up with media after sending a press release.
4. Don't assume the press will attend. Remind and entice them constantly. Give them multiple reasons and "new news" to cover.
5. Don't ignore special interest publications such as La Prensa, Hmong Times, Jewish Life, Senior Federation News, Outdoor News and neighborhood newspapers such as the Southwest Journal, The Bugle, Sun newspapers, Lillie Suburban newspapers, etc.
6. Don't ignore local television or radio talk shows with natural constituencies.
7. Don't forget that those planning for event promotion need to attend the early planning sessions. (Promotion is an important part of the planning process.)
8. Don't forget to post signs on buildings so people know where the forum will take place.
9. Don't forget that people need instructions about what will occur at the forum. (Who asks questions, how long can answers be, when and how does the audience participate — written questions, oral questions etc.)
10. Don't intimidate the audience by keeping them in the dark on process. Explain the format at the beginning of the forum.

## LOOKING FOR SOME HELP?

1. Minnesota Participation Project, an initiative of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits
2. The League of Women Voters
3. The Citizens League
4. Special interest groups (arts, environment, human services, youth, immigrants, etc.)
5. Teachers and professors at all education levels (who can also assign students to attend the forums, ask questions, etc.)
6. Elected local officials, especially if a statewide issue (budget cuts) has forced changes on local government, property taxes, etc.
7. The local Chamber(s) of Commerce
8. Local synagogues, churches, mosques or faith communities — many have social justice, peace and outreach committees
9. Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, or Veterans groups
10. Local business owners

## WITH THREE MONTHS TO GO

**1. Initiate contact with candidates.** Send out a letter inviting all major party candidates. Make a phone call to say that the letter is coming and then make a phone call after the letter has arrived to encourage a response. In Minnesota, it is very important to candidates that forums remain nonpartisan. Emphasize that your legal requirement and intent is to keep the forum strictly nonpartisan. Also, keep in mind that some candidates might not fully understand the impact that nonprofit organizations have in their districts. Therefore, be sure to include information about your organization in the conversations you have and materials you provide to the candidates you invite. Maintain contact with candidates throughout the process. This helps ensure they are comfortable with the format and will participate as planned. E-mail is usually the best means of communications because staff personnel typically monitor this for the candidates.

**2. Initiate contact with members of the media.** Identify the type of coverage you want (local, state, national) as well as who would likely cover the forum. Contact journalists (face-to-face is best) to inform them of the date, time, and location of the forum. It really makes a difference if you can meet in person with the editor (newspaper) or news director (television or radio) in order to encourage their coverage of the forum. Also, meeting with a member of the editorial board (newspaper) can be of great benefit. Designate a spokesperson to be the media liaison. This is a good role for communications staff.

## QUICK-REVIEW TO-DO LIST

### 4 MONTHS:

- o Collaborate with other local nonprofits
- o Set date, time, and place for the event
- o Decide on forum format
- o Develop a budget and stick to it

### 3 MONTHS:

- o Send invitations to candidates
- o Make preliminary media contacts

# TO-DO LIST ON A DEADLINE

*in Minnesota*

## WITH TWO MONTHS LEFT

**1. Begin volunteer recruitment.** E-mail and call your organization's members and solicit volunteers to help with the event. There are many roles for volunteers both in planning the event and on the day of the forum (e.g., greeting audience members, passing out flyers in advance and collecting audience questions for the Q&A). Be sure to recruit enough volunteers to cover these roles (see The Big Day for more information).

**2. Follow-up with the candidates you've invited.** Confirm all candidates' attendance. If you have not heard back from a candidate, contact him or her again. Let them know which other candidates you expect to attend as well as what you are expecting for audience turnout. Remember you need at least two candidates, unless a candidate is running unopposed. If only one candidate in a contested race is able to attend, you must seriously consider canceling the forum (see page 13). Request brief bios from candidates for use in introducing them at the forum. Make sure you and your moderator know how to pronounce candidates' names.

## SOME MINNESOTAN PR ADVICE ON PUBLICIZING YOUR FORUM

1. Promote, promote, promote! Use newsletters, e-mails, phone calls, flyers, public service announcements (PSAs), op/ed pieces, radio – anything that will generate interest. Build intrigue; some races have their own personalities.

2. Talk to your local radio station for PSA requirements.

3. Personally visit media outlets, especially newspaper editors and editorial boards. This establishes a relationship and will allow you to set up a media liaison. Provide regular media updates to this person.

4. Consider asking a local anchor/reporter to facilitate the forum. This strategy could improve chances for media coverage.

5. Make sure there is adequate space for media crews – a place for cameras, a designated press section, and a place for interviews. Provide a press packet that includes information about your organization (and co-sponsoring organizations), information about the candidates, and the rules of the forum. Thank the members of the media for attending. Make it easy for them – cater to their planning, deadlines and technological needs.

6. You have the benefit of being nonpartisan (it's the law) and this is a selling point to get the media on board. Journalists want to provide objective coverage and a candidate forum is an ideal format. Be explicit about your nonpartisanship and how that is good for them.

7. Frame the forum as a "community event" – one that brings citizens together. You are providing information so voters can engage in the democratic process and influence their government. Candidates will attend because this event attracts a large number of voters in one place.

8. Consider the League of Women Voters and other well-respected organizations in your district as potential co-sponsors. This can go a long way in attracting candidates and media. Chambers of commerce, special interest groups, other elected officials and religious organizations often have an interest in motivating their members to vote. Include these co-sponsors in promotional materials to help reach a broader audience.

# WHAT THE POLITICIANS WANT FROM A CANDIDATE FORUM

1. Candidates want a guarantee of neutrality — they don't want to feel like they could be ganged up on. In your invitation, mention that you will filter audience questions.
2. Partner with a well-respected nonprofit in the district. Candidates are aware of nonprofits that have held successful and neutral forums in the past and are more likely to attend those forums.
3. Make sure to invite all major candidates in the district in which you hold the forum.
4. Provide time for candidates to meet informally with voters after the forum.
5. Generating a large audience demonstrates to the candidates that your organization has influence on voters and that they will be able to speak directly to their potential electors. Without a large audience candidates are unlikely to attend.
6. In your invitation to the candidates, briefly mention how your organization affects policy or is engaged in the legislative process. Inform candidates in an unbiased, nonpartisan way. Many already rely on nonprofits for policy information.
7. Candidates are spread thin especially during the election season. They cannot attend every event to which they are invited. For this reason, it is especially important to collaborate with other organizations, combine your efforts and increase your chances that candidates will attend.

## WITH ONE MONTH LEFT

- 1. Assign tasks to volunteers.** Prior to the forum, you will need volunteers to help publicize the event by distributing flyers and recruiting audience members. At the forum, you will need greeters to help with set up and tear down, Q&A and miscellaneous tasks. If you have a Q&A after the forum, you will need volunteers to coordinate, distribute, and collect questions. Keep in mind that your staff and/or your moderator filter questions for appropriateness. This will help to keep it nonpartisan.
- 2. Final confirmation of candidates.** Notify all participating candidates about the format of the forum, the schedule, and other arrangements (e.g., parking, literature table, opportunities for one-on-one voter contact). Candidates in Minnesota see these forums as a good way to maximize interaction with voters. If there are foreseeable problems, such as if you expect protesters, let the candidates know ahead of time so that they may prepare accordingly. Your failure to share such information might decrease the likelihood that candidates will agree to attend another forum sponsored by your organization.
- 3. Hold a mock forum with staff to iron out details.** This should last no more than two hours and should cover all staff responsibilities, including volunteer and candidate coordination.
- 4. Reconfirm site arrangements.**
- 5. Distribute promotional materials.** Maximize your volunteers. Promotional materials should encourage attendance by constituents and might include flyers, mailings within the district and phone calls to community leaders. Encourage other nonprofits in the area to promote your event.
- 6. Remind the media.** This includes media representatives who have expressed interest in attending as well as those who have not but who your organization hopes will attend. Be prepared to provide public service announcements (PSAs) and other promotional materials about your forum upon request.

## QUICK-REVIEW TO-DO LIST

### 2 MONTHS:

- o Begin volunteer recruitment
- o Follow-up on candidate invites

### 1 MONTH:

- o Assign volunteers to tasks
- o Final confirmation of candidates
- o Hold a mock forum
- o Reconfirm site arrangements
- o Distribute promotional materials
- o Remind media about the forum

# TO-DO LIST ON A DEADLINE *in Minnesota*

## WITH LESS THAN A MONTH TO GO

**1. Select moderator.** The moderator should be nonpartisan and should live outside the voting district. The moderator and his/her perceived objectivity is crucial to a successful event. Select and prepare this individual to ensure objectivity. Try to identify an individual who is well respected and outside of your voting district. A journalist is a good person to choose as the moderator. These individuals typically are viewed as objective and nonpartisan. Prepare your moderator (give them the questions well in advance, review the process and format with them, help them to shape conversations, and do practice runs).

**2. Finish volunteer recruitment.** Be sure your number of volunteers is proportional to your expected audience.

**3. Continue to recruit attendees.** Make phone calls, send e-mails, and knock on doors. Do whatever it takes to ensure that your forum reaches its intended audience. Keep weather in mind and avoid days where other competing community events are taking place.

**4. Contact volunteers to confirm their duties at the forum.** Remember that some volunteers will need to be at the forum earlier than others, depending on their duties. Have a staff member in charge of coordinating all volunteers for the evening to keep the event running smoothly.

**5. Final media reminder.** In Minnesota, this means sharing all information that helps sell your forum to media personnel. For example, if there are questions you have prepared for candidates, share those with the journalists covering your forum. Follow up with a reminder call one day before the event. Provide media packets that include information on your organization, co-sponsors, if appropriate, and candidate information. This should include forum format as well.

**6. Write an op/ed piece.** Articulate the importance of informed voting and pitch your forum as a vehicle. Be sure to restate the nonpartisan nature of this forum. This should be written by the leader of your organization or media editorial staff. This might include issues your organization hopes will be covered at the forum.

**7. Select a timekeeper for the event.** This should be a staff person whose responsibility is keeping the forum on schedule. When selecting a timekeeper, keep in mind that it is likely this person will need to interrupt people in order to keep time. Provide timekeeper color-coded cards during the forum for timing: Green card = start, yellow card = 30 seconds remain, red card = stop.

## ON THE BIG DAY

**1. Complete set-up at forum facility.** Plan ahead so that you have ample time, staff and volunteers for your set-up needs. Bring nameplates for candidates, the moderator and any other important persons at your forum. Don't forget to have a literature table outside the forum for candidates and organizations to distribute materials.

**2. Have volunteers greet audience members and candidates.** A volunteer should be assigned to each candidate. Identify a point person (typically staff) for volunteers to seek out in case of problems. Have plenty of volunteers to collect audience questions if your format has a question and answer period. Staff members should review the questions for content. Make certain questions are concise, clear and focus on a single concept. Do not ask candidates leading questions that point toward a desired response. Remember, candidates expect a neutral debate so the questions must also be neutral.

**3. Provide a head table** from where candidates will speak during the forum. Include nameplates, table skirt and microphone(s).

**4. Welcome.** Typically, this is the moderator's job. Don't forget to thank each candidate for coming. This is also the time to recognize sponsoring organization(s), volunteers and staff.

**5. Review the rules of the forum.** Again, this is the moderator's role and should include reviewing the forum format (see Page 2). At this time the moderator reminds the audience of the nonpartisan nature of the event, including a prohibition on cheering or shouting.

**6. Hold Q&A period after the forum.** Q&A time is optional though highly recommended. Even if your forum is formatted to use questions generated by the audience, it is beneficial to provide time after the forum for the audience to ask questions of the candidates informally. Candidates want forums to reach a broad, nonpartisan audience. They encourage forum sponsors to include Q&A in order to cover issues that might not have arisen during the forum and/or need additional attention.

Because some Minnesota candidates find it more useful to go door-to-door to solicit votes than to attend a candidate forum, including a Q&A allows candidates one-on-one time with a broad audience and can encourage candidates to attend.

Also, Minnesota candidates want time allotted to shake hands and talk directly with potential voters. You should offer candidates this opportunity ahead of time so you can add it to the promotional materials.

## QUICK-REVIEW TO-DO LIST

### LESS THAN 1 MONTH:

- o Select a moderator
- o Finish volunteer recruitment
- o Urge and promote audience attendance
- o Final press release and contact
- o Write op/ed piece
- o Select a timekeeper

### ON THE BIG DAY:

- o Complete set-up at forum
- o Designate volunteers to greet
- o Set up a head table
- o Remember to welcome everyone
- o Review forum rules
- o Have a Q&A after the forum