



## The Minnesota Participation Project: Nonpartisan Nonprofit Voter Mobilization

*The Minnesota Participation Project is an initiative of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits with support from Grassroots Solutions*

### Candidate Events: Finding Your Format

*A great way to engage voters and acquaint them with the candidates and their issues is to organize a candidate event. There are many different formats to choose from – from a traditional debate style forum to something less formal, such as a candidate fair, with the opportunity for voters to speak directly with their elected officials.*

#### General Rules around Candidate Events:

Federal Tax and Election Laws permit 501(c)(3) and (c)(4) organizations that do not endorse, support, or oppose candidates or parties to stage candidate events in which:

- the sponsoring organization invited all qualified candidates,
- an independent panel prepared the questions,
- the topics covered a broad range of issues, including those of particular importance to the sponsor’s members,
- each candidate has an equal opportunity to present his or her views, and
- the moderator is neutral and acts in an unbiased manner, including making a statement at the beginning and end of the program that the views expressed are not that of the sponsoring organization.

FEC rules, which the IRS is likely to follow, provide that at least two candidates must participate for the event to be nonpartisan; minor party candidates do not always have to be included. These rules apply to any candidate event, no matter the format.

<b>Debates</b>	<b>Forums</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equal time for each candidate</li> <li>- Candidates attend event at same time</li> <li>- Prepared and Spontaneous debate*</li> <li>- Discourse debate*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equal time for each candidate</li> <li>- Candidates attend event individually               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Town Hall*</li> <li>- Q and A*</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Fairs</b>	<b>Meetings</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equal time and visibility</li> <li>- Candidates table and speak with public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equal time with each candidate</li> <li>- Representatives from organization meet with Candidates privately</li> </ul>

\* See page 2 of *A Nonprofit’s Guide to Hosting Candidate Forums* for details on these formats

Information in this document is courtesy of the Alliance for Justice, *The Rules of the Game: An Election Year Legal Guide for Nonprofit Organizations*. 1996. [www.afj.org](http://www.afj.org).

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