

HANDOUT 6.2: A Framework for Organizing an All-Candidates' Debate

It is important when hosting an event at your school that things are run professionally and efficiently. Consider the following as you arrange your event. Check your school district's policy before planning.



PREPARATION:

- Decide on a time, date and location.
- Invite all candidates running in one or more of your local election races (mayor or council) to participate in the meeting/debate.
- Determine if the event will be held in-person or virtually.
- Consider videotaping, podcasting and/or live-streaming the event to share with other schools in your municipality.
- Work with school staff to set up audio equipment and seating, if applicable.
- Recruit a moderator (teacher, student, community leader or journalist).



QUESTIONS:

- Determine the timing for questions and answers and whether all, some or one candidate will respond.
- Plan questions in advance and encourage other classes to submit questions to increase interest and engagement. Consider both personal and policy questions (e.g., Why did you decide to run? What makes you qualified for the job? How will you improve the community? What is your number one priority if elected?)

TIP:

Create a digital form to share with teachers across the school. Each class can contribute questions through the form or collaborate doc. Ask teachers to note student names next to the questions when possible.

- Once the questions have been selected, confirm which students will ask the questions.



FORMAT:

- Use a combination of short (i.e., 30 seconds) and longer responses (i.e., 2 minutes each). Make sure that the time limits are announced and monitored with a stopwatch.
- Establish an agenda and guidelines for the meeting to share with candidates and participating classes.
- Below is a suggested framework:
 - a) **Introduction** – The moderator should welcome the audience, introduce the candidates and detail the structure of the meeting (3 minutes).
 - b) **Opening statements** – Brief introductory statements from the candidates (2 minutes each).
 - c) **Planned questions** – Ask the pre-determined questions to the candidates (25-30 minutes).
 - d) **Open questions** – Give the audience an opportunity to ask final questions to specific candidates (10-15 minutes).
 - e) **Closing statements** – Final words from the candidates (1-2 minutes each).
 - f) **Thank you** – Plan a formal thank you from designated students (2 minutes).



ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DEBATE:

- Ensure a respectful, neutral and non-partisan environment.
- If a candidate declines, cancels or does not show up, respect their campaign schedule and ensure that students are aware that the candidate is running in the election but is unable to attend.
- Communicate expectations regarding behaviour and participation.
- You can invite parents/guardians or members from the community, but non student audience members should NOT ask questions.
- Have students take notes during the debate to review the next class.
- If possible, provide time for students to talk with the candidates after the meeting and offer some refreshments.