SCARBOROUGH CIVIC ACTION NETWORK

Educate yourself, improve your community.

Guide to Organizing an

All-Candidates Meeting

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Introduction ●

All-Candidates Meetings are central to democratic processes and are an important element of civic action and engagement.

All-Candidates Meetings are central to the democratic process. These meetings establish connections between candidates and residents; allow voters to make informed decisions on election-day; give candidates the opportunity to present their platforms on issues that matter to residents; and give residents the opportunity to raise issues that they feel need to be addressed by the successful candidate.

This is a step-by-step guide on how to organize an All-Candidates Meeting. This guide will help you carry out an effective and successful All-Candidates Meeting, contribute to local democratic processes and make a substantial difference in the quality of life of individuals in your community.

ICON KEY
🗁 Organizational Tasks
🕐 Logistics
💻 Communication
☺ Publicity
✏ Secretarial duties

How to Use This Manual

This manual is hands-on and action oriented. Each of the symbols in the 'Icon Key' identifies the kinds of tasks that need to be taken in each step of the process.

If the Organizing Committee decides to do so, they can split up responsibilities based on these icons.

Step 1
Creating an Organizing Committee

Organizing Committees ensure continuity, maximize efficiency and reduce confusion. Once an Organizing Committee is in place, you can allocate responsibilities!

The first step to creating an All-Candidates Meeting is to establish an Organizing Committee responsible for overseeing the organization of the event. Step 1 prepares you to plan the event in an organized fashion and to get residents of the ward or riding involved.

This step is also important because it ensures that the work of organizing the event is divided up so that one person does not end up organizing the event on their own. If the work is divided up properly, you are also demonstrating to the candidates that residents are engaged in and care about the community.

Step 1 consists of...

- o **Creating an Organizing Committee**
- o **Assigning Roles to Organizing Committee Members**
- o **Finding Volunteers**
- o **Setting Meeting Dates**

Create an Organizing Committee

The role of the Organizing Committee is to oversee the organization of the All-Candidates Meeting. Establish an Organizing Committee as soon as possible!

The Organizing Committee should be made up of a diverse group of people and be inclusive. Any resident of the ward or riding should be welcome to participate in organizing the event.

Finding Members

Finding people to help organize your All-Candidates Meeting may be difficult. Below, we have identified a number of places to look for individuals to join the Organizing Committee.

Friends and/or Family	Youth groups	Business Associations
Community Workers at your local centre	Neighbourhood Associations	Local organizations

Assign Roles (Optional)

By assigning roles to Organizing Committee members, you can maximize efficiency and reduce confusion of who is meant to do what.

We have identified five positions and their corresponding responsibilities. Whether or not you would like to assign roles to members of the Organization Committee is up to you!

Roles of Organizing Committee Members

Group Coordinator
Creates meeting agendas, acts as the official spokesperson for the Organizing Committee, maintains contact with the Organizing Committee members and ensures that tasks are completed on time. The Local Group Coordinator also provides assistance to the members when required.

Secretary
Takes notes during meeting (minutes) and circulates them to all members of the Organizing Committee. Records the All-Candidates Meeting.

Public Outreach Coordinator
Designs a flyer to advertise the All-Candidates Meeting and distributes promotional materials to Organizing Committee members and other organizations to post flyers and promotional material throughout the ward/riding.
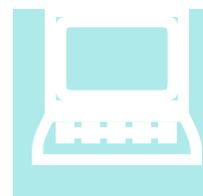
Candidate Recruitment Coordinator
Contacts candidates running in your ward or riding, extends invitations to participate in the All-Candidates Meeting and follows up with the candidates as required.

Logistics Coordinator
Books a suitable venue, organizes the material and equipment required for the event, coordinates the set up of Voter Education Information kiosk at the event and develops and distributes the itinerary of the event to the Organizing Committee.

Set Meetings

Once you have your Organizing Committee in place, set all of your meetings from the date that you first meet, to the date of the All-Candidates Meeting. By setting your meeting dates in advance, you can better avoid scheduling conflicts.

It is recommended that the Organizing Committee meet at least once a month. Between each meeting, members must accomplish the tasks they are responsible for.

Running Organizing Committee Meetings

At each of meetings, you should…

- Review what each individual has accomplished since the last meeting
- Identify what needs to be done, who will carry out the task and when it must be completed by

We encourage that at each Organizing Committee meeting you have the secretary take minutes so that you know what it is you discussed at the meeting.

Finding Volunteers

It is important to ask others in the community if they are interested in assisting to organize the event.

Why? First, the more volunteers, the more you will get the word out about the event and the more people will attend. Second, the more resident volunteers, the more you demonstrate to candidates for City Councillor that the community is engaged and interested in issues that affect their quality of life.

To find volunteers, contact local community centers, libraries and public schools. The more people you get in touch with, the more people know about the event.

When you have gathered volunteers

If you have a lot of volunteers, organize them into 'Working Groups,' depending on their strengths and/or interests. Each working group should have a representative on the Organizing Committee.

When recruiting volunteers, ask: Why might they want to organize this event?
Desire to give community service and give back to the community
Desire to learn about and meet the candidates
Contributing to democracy and the political process
They are asked by friends or business ties
They want recognition of particular causes
To obtain confirmation that the candidates will support their cause

Step 2

Logistics

*Choose a date, time and location for the event as soon as possible
to ensure that the candidates can come!*

The Organizing Committee must decide when and where they would like to have the All-Candidates Meeting. This must be established **as soon as possible** to make sure that all of the candidates can attend the event.

Step 2 consists of…

- Selecting a date, time and place
- Contacting the candidates

Select a date, time and place

When?
The best time to hold public events is a weekday evening or Saturday.

Tip
It is recommended to give the candidates two choices of dates. That way, the candidates can select the date that is best for them, which limits the possibility of the candidates having a scheduling conflict.

Where?
Reserve a location for the event for the two dates you selected. Look into using a public space such as a library, public school, university/college campus, community centre or a senior's centre because these spaces are often free or can be rented at a minimal cost.

Tip
When selecting a location, make an effort to …   a) Select a space you are confident you can fill. The more packed the space, the more impressive the event appears and the more worthwhile it is for the candidates to attend.   b) Choose a location that is accessible by car or public transit   c) Choose a location that is accessible for people with disabilities

When reserving a location, remember to...
a) Book the time required for set-up and clean-up
b) Ask about insurance and the materials they provide such as chairs, tables and sound systems

Contact Candidates

✓ First, find out who the candidates for City Councillor in your ward are. You can invite *all* of the candidates to be as non-partisan as possible.

✓ Call the candidate and ask to speak to the Campaign Manager or Scheduling Assistant. Ask them if the candidate is available on the first date of your choice. If they cannot make it, ask them if they are available on the second date of choice.

✓ Fax, email or drop an invitation off within a day of contacting the candidate.

✓ Give the candidates three or four days to respond and call them back to secure their attendance.

Tip

Your Letter of Invitation should inform the candidates of the:

- Date, time and place of the event
- Format of the meeting or a point stating that you will follow-up closer to the event with a schedule for the event which will also outline the format of the meeting.

Step 3

Fill in Details

Once you have chosen a date and invited the candidates, you can spend time filling in the details of the event.

D etails can make or break an event. The details of the event also set the tone of the event. Filling in the details of an All Candidates Meeting requires the Organizing Committee to make decisions around how you want the candidates to present their platforms and what kind of debate-format you want to use. In this step, the Organizing Committee must also begin to prepare materials that will be required on the day of the event.

Step 3 consists of...

- o **Planning the format of the event**
- o **Selecting a Moderator, Interview Panel or Timekeeper**
- o **Planning the logistics of the event**
- o **Preparing questions to ask candidates**
- o **Developing Guidelines and Code of Conducts**

Plan the format of the event

There are a number of ways you can format your All-Candidates Meeting. In formal meetings, questions are preselected and each candidate has an equal amount of time to answer each question or speak to identified issues. In informal meetings, constituents are given the opportunity to 'meet and greet' candidates.

Choose any of the below components and custom-make your own event!

Components of All-Candidates Meetings

Welcome & Introduction	Moderator welcomes candidates and guests, and thanks them for attending the event. He/She also reviews the agenda for the evening and the chosen format.	4 min
Candidate Introductions	Candidates are each given an equal length of time to introduce themselves, why they are running and/or present broad issues that are important to them.	1.5-2 min each

Interview Panel: Preselected Questions	Panelists ask the candidates questions that have been *preselected* by the community or Organizing Committee. Questions should be on issues that have been identified by the community. ✑ **Pro:** This allows the community to really think about and ask questions that matter to them. ☞ **Con:** Questions have to be thoughtful and concise – not long and rambling. Ensure questions relate to role of Councillor.	1-2 min each
Interview Panel: Submitted Questions	Residents submit their questions in writing at the beginning and during the event. Panelists randomly draw questions and screen them to ensure that they are on topics that have not been asked, are appropriate, are on issues that would affect the community as a whole (and not just one or two members) and are respectful. ✑ **Pro:** Allows shy people to ask questions. It allows the audience to speak without the possibility of losing control over the event. ☞ **Con:** Puts more pressure on the Panelists. Questions have to be concise. Ensure questions relate to role of Councillor.	1-2 min each
Audience Questions	Moderator asks for questions from the audience. These questions are *not* preselected by the Organizers. Moderator limits questions to a certain amount of time or a certain number of questions. ✑ **Pro:** Voters can ask personalized questions on issues that they believe are important. ☞ **Con:** Audience members can be longwinded and partisan. Moderator's role will be more difficult.	1-2 min each
Candidate Platforms	Candidates are each given the same amount of time to discuss issues that matter to them and their platform. This allows them to go into specific issues they think are important. ✑ **Pro:** Candidates can highlight the issues that matter to them and voters get a better sense of what they do if elected. ☞ **Con:** Candidates will not necessarily speak to issues that matter MOST to the community. They will focus on their own strengths/concerns.	3 min each
Rebuttals	You might want to allow candidates to respond to each other, especially if they are discussing issues that are contentious or important to the community. If you allow rebuttals, give the candidates a specific amount of time to speak so that they do not go off on tangents or arguments! ✑ **Pro:** Candidates will respond if another candidate is not answering a question or not providing enough information. Rebuttals allow for a lively debate. ☞ **Con:** Candidates may point fingers, behave disrespectfully, pick on incumbents or particular candidates and move the event away from issue-based discussion to personality-based discussion.	1-2 min each

Wild Cards	Wild cards allow candidates to rebut, but do so in a controlled manner. Each candidate receives the same number of wild cards (2-5 cards). Each wild card is worth the same number of minutes (1-2 min). Candidates can use their wild cards whenever they like to respond to another candidate.	1-2 min each
	✍ **Pro:** Candidates respond if another candidate is not answering a question, not providing enough information or attacking them. Wild cards allow for a lively but controlled debate. ☞ **Con:** Candidates may point fingers, behave disrespectfully, pick on incumbents or particular candidates and move the event away from issue-based discussion to personality-based discussion.	
Meet & Greet	This is a more 'informal' kind All-Candidates Meeting. Constituents and candidates are given time to walk around the room, get to know each other and discuss issues that matter to the community.	30 min
	✍ **Pro:** Meet and Greets allow voters to meet candidates and get to know them on a more personal, informal level. ☞ **Con:** This may not allow for adequate discussions of issues that matter to the community. For those who are shy, it might be intimidating to approach candidates.	
Speed Dating	This is slightly more formal than the a meet and greet. For this event format, tables are laid out throughout the room. One candidate sits at each table. Voters are assigned to a table when they enter the room and are given a list of questions they could ask candidates. Each candidate is given 10-15 min to speak with the voters at each table. When time is up and the bell rings, the candidates move to the next table.	10-15 min each
	✍ **Pro:** Allows voters to meet candidates and get to know them on a more personal, informal level. Allows voters to ask questions directly to candidates and demand answers. ☞ **Con:** Candidates might take over discussions at the table and not allow voters to speak about issues that matter to them. For those who are shy, it might be intimidating.	
Voter Education	You may want to do a quick reminder for participants regarding how, when and where to vote on election day. It is important to also remind them how to vote if they have not received a Voter Information Card in the mail and are not on the Voter's List.	10 min

Custom-make your own All-Candidates Meeting

When you plan the format of your meeting, remember to be creative! You can choose a number of the components above to mix-and-match.

Tip
Some combinations that work well are: a) Welcome + Candidate Introductions + Speed Dating/Meet & Greet b) Welcome + Candidate Platforms + Audience Questions + Rebuttal c) Welcome + Candidate Introductions + Interview Panel (Preselected questions and/or submitted questions) + Wild Cards/Rebuttals

Plan the detailed logistics of the event

Be familiar with the venue

✓ Make sure that there are enough chairs and tables. If there are not enough available, look into renting chairs and tables early. Make sure to get quotes from a number of rental places because these costs can add up!

✓ Familiarize yourself with the acoustics in the space. Think about if you will need a microphone and sound system.

✓ Have a sense of how you want the space to be set up before the event.

Plan the timing of the event

How much time do you want to allocate to Voter Education, if any?

How much time do you want to allocate to each component of the All-Candidates Meeting?

Tip
Try to keep your event around 2.5 hours. It is difficult to do, but many people cannot stay for longer than this!

Example of Organization of the All-Candidates Meeting

Components of Event	Who	Time Allocated
Voter education	Organizers	10 Minutes
Welcome Review Agenda	Moderator	5 minutes
Introduction of Candidates	Candidates	1.5 minutes each x 5 = 7.5 minutes
Preselected Question 1	Panelist	1 minute
Answers	Candidates	2 minutes each x 5 = 10 minutes
Preselected Question 2	Panelist	1 minute
Answers	Candidates	2 minutes each x 5 = 10 minutes
Questions from audience	Candidates	30 minutes all-together
Closing Thank You Where you can get more information	Moderator	3 Minutes

Select a Moderator, Interview Panel & Timekeeper

Moderator
The role of the moderator is to introduce the event and candidates. The moderator moderates audience questions, keeps the event moving on time, is responsible for ensuring that each candidate is given the opportunity to answer each question, and maintains a respectful environment throughout the debate.

Interview Panel
The interview panel is responsible for posing questions to the candidates at the event. If you choose to ask preselected questions, the panel simply asks the candidates the questions. However, if you choose to have questions submitted in writing by the audience at the event, the panel must read through the questions on the spot and select the questions they feel best represents the community.

It is recommended that the Organizing Committee selects a diverse group of people, including diverse ages and genders.

Timekeeper
The role of the timekeeper is to keep the track of how long each speaker and candidate speaks for, and notify them when they are running out of time.

Prepare Questions to Ask Candidates

✓ Learn the role of City Councillors and what they have influence over

✓ Examine what matters to communities in your Ward
- Surveys
- Speak to friends and colleagues

✓ Draft your own questions
- Short and concise
- Ensure that preambles and questions do not turn into speeches
- Personalize questions by making reference to the community or personal experiences
- Make sure that anecdotes are well articulated

✓ Select which questions will be asked
- Choose questions on diverse topics/issues
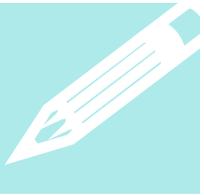
Develop Guidelines and Code of Conduct

Guidelines for Panelists

To prepare the interview panelists, you might want to develop some guidelines for them to follow. Below are examples of guidelines.

- Feel free to read a number of questions to get a sense of what kinds of questions the audience is asking. Also, feel free to combine questions if there are a number of questions on the same topic.
- Present questions so that there is a natural flow to the debate. For example, ask a question on a specific topic and then follow with a general question.
- Ensure that topics are not addressed more than once, so a broad range of issues are covered in the limited time available
- Have discretion to select questions that are more concrete and challenging, versus vague and unfocused
- You do not have to read the questions directly as they are written. If you are able, focus questions, present them in a respectful manner and express them as eloquently/succinctly as possible
- Do not pose questions that require candidates to say who they will vote for in the election
- Do not pose questions that are only addressed to one candidate. All questions must be addressed to all candidates

Code of Conduct

Sometimes debates can get rowdy. It is important to set ground rules so that candidates and guests are aware that disrespectful comments and behavior will not be tolerated. Feel free to say: "If you feel that you are unable to abide by the code of conduct, we ask that you do not attend this event."

You can send the code of conduct before the event to the candidates, post these guidelines on the doors of the event location or print these off for the candidates to sign before the debate.

Below are a number of rules that you can use at your events.

- A reasonable decorum will be expected by the guests and candidates to ensure a fair and equitable discussion. The moderator will ensure and maintain a productive and respectful environment.
- If anyone acts out of line and fails to maintain a reasonable decorum, they will be asked to leave the event immediately. We take the security and respect of candidates and guests very seriously.
- We ask the candidates to respect each other by not speaking over one another and speaking to each other in a civilized manner.
- We ask the audience to respect the candidates and applaud good ideas rather than the candidates themselves.
- No campaign related information can be passed out inside of the debate room– if you wish to hand out material, do so before and after the question and answer period at your table. No campaign related buttons, banners or posters are allowed in the debate room.

Step 4

Publicize

Prioritize publicity!

It is important to start advertizing as soon as you can so that people are aware of the event before their schedules become overwhelmed. Make use of a number of methods to get the word out.

Publicizing

Contact local media, including community weeklies
You can do this by sending a brief email to a journalist with who, what, where and when information of your event.

Put up flyers
Put flyers up in public spaces. These include community centers, libraries, cafes, bus stops, apartment buildings and so on. They should all be located in your ward.

Contact Community Centers and Local Agencies
Speak to community workers at your Community Centers and Agencies. Request that they bring people to the event.

Call friends, families and colleagues
Ask those you know to come! Ensure that they live in your ward and remind them to bring others!

Send emails to networks
Networks like SCAN have large contact lists. If you send a brief email with important details to these networks, they might agree to distribute it.

Tip

Remind people to come to the event the week before it happens. This is important to get people out because they might forget that the event is taking place.

As well, use word-of-mouth as much as possible. People are more inclined to come to an event if personally asked.

Step 5

The Day Of

The day of any event can be busy. Be as organized as possible!

To ensure that the event runs smoothly and is as beneficial as possible, it is very important to be as organized as possible. Make sure that you have all the materials you require for the event ready.

Step 5 consists of...

- o **Gathering materials**
- o **Taking notes of the Meeting**
- o **Setting up a voter education table**
- o **Promoting Civic Action in Scarborough**

Gather Materials

The following is a list of the materials you may need on the day of the event.

Stop Watch	To keep track of the time
One yellow & one red piece of paper	To indicate to the speakers and candidates how much time they have left to speak Yellow = 20 second warning | Red = time's up
Tables & Chairs	Tables required for the candidates, time keeper/panelists & candidate's campaign materials
Pads of paper & pens	For the candidates so that they can take notes
Microphone	If required
Name Cards	To be placed in front of each candidate
Computer & Projector	To give the Voter Education presentation
Copies of the agenda	Organizing Committee needs copies to keep the event moving forward & knows what is happening
Voter Education Materials/Resources	You can obtain these from SCAN
Wild Cards	If required
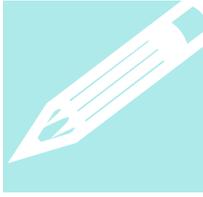
Taking Notes of the Event

It is recommended that you have someone take notes of the event or record the event (video or audio). This generally falls under the responsibilities of the Secretary.

Notes should include:

- Which questions were asked
- How the questioned were answered by the candidates
- The verbal commitments made by the candidates

Set up a Voter Education Table

It is very important to have a table dedicated to Voter Education. Here, constituents can pick up information about voting and can ask questions.

Promote Civic Action in Scarborough

SCAN is a well-known network in Scarborough. It organizes many events every year, bringing organizations and individuals together to discuss issues that matter to Scarborough residents as citizens of Toronto, Ontario and Canada. It also plays an important role in mobilizing towards civic action and engagement.

As the organizers of the event, you represent one of many Scarborough Civic Action Network groups carrying out voter education throughout Scarborough. We hope that you use this platform to promote future engagement within your community.

We have provided a sign-up sheet for those interested in becoming members of the Scarborough Civic Action Network and in staying informed.

Step 6

After the Event

Congratulations on completing your event! After the event, it is important to complete some specific tasks.

Upon completing your event, it is important to debrief and wrap up some loose ends. These final steps are an important part of organizing the event because it allows you to learn from the challenges you experienced and establish relationships with the candidates and SCAN.

Debrief Organizing Committee

Debriefing does not have to take a long time but it is important. Debriefing consists of reviewing and assessing the successes and challenges of organizing the event, how efforts could be improved for the next election and perhaps discussing the commitments made by each candidate.

This meeting should not take longer than an hour. The secretary should take minutes of this meeting.

Follow up

With Candidates

- Send a 'Thank you' note to each of the candidates for participating in the event. Also thank the moderator, panelists, timekeepers and volunteers.
- Reiterate your support for specific commitments they made, which the Organizing Committee also supported

With Scarborough Civic Action Network (SCAN)

- Report the successes and challenges of the All-Candidates Meeting
- Forward the completed SCAN membership form
- Send any stories or pictures!