



## Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

*UU advocacy in the nation's capital*



# UUSJ's Guide to UU Questions for Candidates 2020: Getting Candidates on the Record

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## Introduction

Unitarian Universalists must be active participants in the democratic process, especially during this critical election year. As Unitarian Universalist Association President Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray reminds us, “Core Unitarian Universalist values -- values of interdependence, democracy, human worth and dignity, and the inborn right of all peoples to self-determination -- are on the line.

“When we show up as people of faith, with these values front and center, we are offering a viable alternative to narratives and policies of domination, supremacy, scarcity, and exploitation that threaten and diminish our lives and future,” Frederick-Gray says. (UU World Winter 2019)

As individual UUs, we choose candidates but can multiply our impact when we organize collectively and in partnership with those who share our values.

Our Seven Principles call us to affirm “the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” require “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations” and respect “the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.”

These guide our “free and responsible search for truth and meaning” and the “use of democratic process” in our congregations and beyond. The 4th and 5th Principles especially undergird our support for the democratic process, and call us to act.

**The election cycle is part of our democratic process and offers many opportunities for our ongoing justice work and civic engagement.**



To help Unitarian Universalists take advantage of these opportunities, the UUA launched a new electoral organizing campaign on [January 12: “UU the Vote,”](#) aimed at growing and sharpening our faith-based organizing efforts during this 2020 election season. Led by the UUA’s Organizing Strategy Team, the campaign is collaborating with movement partners as well as UU organizations (including UUSJ), state advocacy networks, congregations and individuals. There will be followup training sessions too.

**By mobilizing for the elections, we can move our faith communities into new or deeper action, try new activities and work with new partners or deepen relationships with existing partners, and go beyond what we have done in the past.**

When we do justice work in partnership with the larger community, it strengthens our relationships for the long-haul work required after the elections to create and defend the beloved community.

## About UUSJ:

The mission of the Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice is to mobilize and amplify the voices of UUs as we seek to change the world through acts of love and justice. As a nonpartisan organization, UUSJ engages at the federal level across the political spectrum to work for positive change and advocate for UU Values. As a 501(c)3(h) organization, UUSJ does not endorse candidates or parties.

## About this Guide

UUs are great at conducting traditional voter registration and Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts. **Let's build on that and find more ways for UUs to engage in mobilizing voters this year and beyond.**

Asking questions is important during the candidating season. **Candidates need to hear from you!** What candidates learn on the campaign trail informs them on the issues their constituents care about. This can influence what they might do, if elected.

It's important in every election to engage with candidates as they host town halls, attend social events and candidate forums and meet with voters before the election. These are great ways to lift up our UU values and concerns to candidates and those attending public forums.

**Consider adding to your congregation's voter mobilization efforts by engaging with candidates and getting them on the record on UU faith-based social justice issues.**

### **This Guide can help your congregation:**

- **Ramp up your UU the Vote efforts** to become more engaged and better-informed voters.
- **Discern the UU values most important to your community** and learn how they are grounded in our UU Principles.
- **Raise UU issues with candidates and get them on the record** by asking questions directly in public places and events, at candidates forums sponsored by the candidate and community organizations you partner with or forums your congregation hosts.
- **Create opportunities to build relationships for future conversations** and for holding them accountable.
- **Build support** for or against legislation, programs, projects, or issues important to your community.
- **Inform UUs and the public about issues and the positions of candidates** vying to represent you. We need to know where candidates stand on our UU value issues and share this with community members.
- **Deepen relationships within your congregation and with community partners** for the long-haul work required once the elections are over.

## Make the most of the Guide:

Use this Guide as a starting point in your congregation to begin a discernment process for in-depth discussion on important issues for your congregation and community. Develop your own questions for local, state and/or federal candidates and localize your questions.

No team in your congregation? Use this Guide as an individual. See attachment #1 about finding and getting candidates on the record and #3 for tips on speaking at public forums. Consider writing letters to the editor or op-eds.

Use the questions in this Guide with your candidates for the US Congress “as is” or adapt them. Although the Guide’s questions are aimed at candidates for the US Congress, they can be adapted for any public office to address your specific state and local issues and perspectives.

**Asking questions grounded in UU values gives us an opportunity to raise our concerns not only with candidates but with the general public, too.**

### Why Advocate?

“Unless someone like you cares  
a whole awful lot, Nothing is  
going to get better. It's not.”  
- Dr. Seuss, The Lorax



# Our Spiritual Grounding

People of faith can be powerful and prophetic without being partisan. We can engage our neighbors, educate our communities, mobilize voters, rally around ballot initiatives, and help shape the public debate by rooting our actions in our theology and Principles.

Participating in our democracy goes beyond just our 5<sup>th</sup> Principle. As UUs, our deepest beliefs are a life-giving, life-saving, life-sustaining alternative to policies of domination, supremacy, exceptionalism, and exploitation.

Our justice work and electoral engagement is guided by our values of:

- **Interdependence:** We believe all life is sacred and interconnected, and that human beings are radically dependent on one another and on our precious earth and its creatures. This calls us to build societies that care for all species, and enact policies centering cooperation and solidarity over individualism and competition.
- **Democracy:** We believe decision making must ensure that all communities are heard, especially those who have been historically silenced. We believe all people have a right to elect leaders and shape policies that directly affect their lives and access to resources.
- **Inherent Worth and Dignity Across Difference:** We believe all people are born from love, and that nothing can separate them from that inherent belovedness. We believe this inherent worth of people of all races, genders, abilities, sexualities, nationalities, and religions should be mirrored in the societies, structures, institutions, and policies that shape their lives.
- **Pluralism and Diversity:** We believe in the teachings of the natural sciences that demonstrate the richest and healthiest ecosystems are those with the greatest diversity. While we share many commonalities, we believe our differences are fundamentally beautiful, and our diversity—of race, gender, belief, practice, culture, ability, sexuality, and more—is to be celebrated with curiosity and affirmation.
- **Self-Determination and Human Agency:** We believe each person is an expert in their own experience and should have access to the conditions that ensure lives of belonging, safety, wellness, and joy. We believe we must dismantle any system, structure, or policy preventing people from making decisions about their own lives, or accessing what they need to be free and whole.

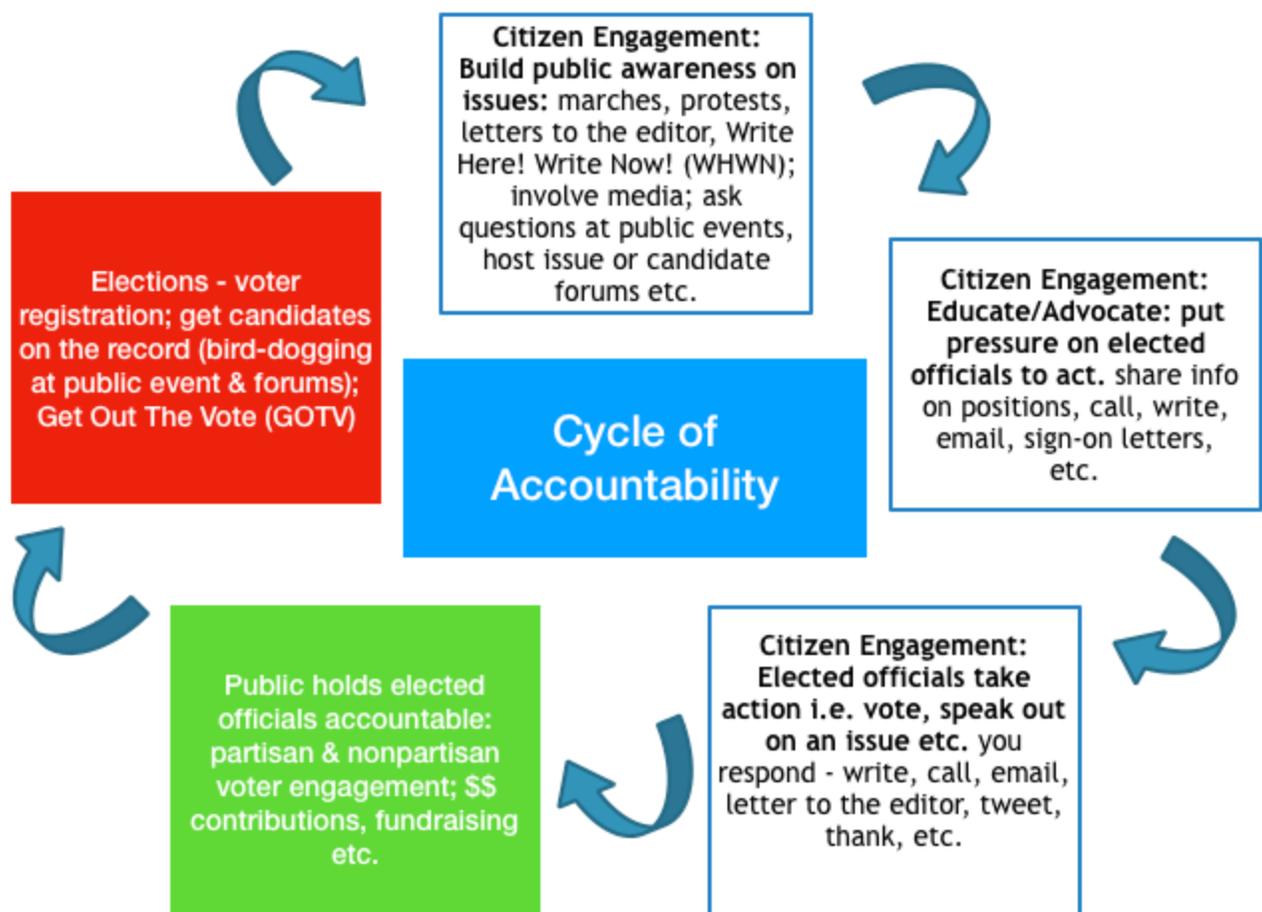
-- Adapted from the UU the Vote Toolkit

[https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/uuthevote\\_team\\_building\\_toolkit\\_1.pdf](https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/uuthevote_team_building_toolkit_1.pdf)



After the election... UUs must continue to raise our voices on critical social justice issues. Civic engagement and advocacy is a year-round responsibility.  
Democracy is not a spectator sport!

## Citizen Engagement





## Planning Tips

### **Ways to Get Started**

- Talk with your congregation’s minister, lay leaders, and those engaged in social justice** about participating in “UU the Vote” activities. Information is available at UUA’s [UU the Vote](#). Even if you missed the January 12 launch webinar of UU the Vote, read the materials to help organize your efforts, and consider hosting a meeting to view the recording of the webinar.
- Connect with existing partners and identify new ones both within your congregation and in the community.** On the UU the Vote webpage, read the [UU the Vote Team Building Toolkit](#). See the More Resources section for details.
- Host a gathering to discern the issues most important in your community and congregation.** Allow at least two hours. If it’s around meal time, bring snacks or make it a potluck. Consider hosting an issues forum in the community to learn about community members’ concerns.
- As part of the discernment process, consider why an issue is important.** How is it grounded in our faith? Has the denomination or General Assembly taken a position on the issue, such as a Statement of Conscience, Congregational Study Action Issue, or Action of Immediate Witness? Learn about the issue.
- Using this Guide, **identify several possible issues and add issues specific to your congregation and community.** Decide if the focus will be local, state or federal. List the issues with the most support on a flip chart. If needed, rank issues by dot voting. For each issue, list the top questions and which candidate(s) to question. Customize your questions for the candidate.

## Engaging with Candidates

 **What's your game plan?** Create an engagement plan for each candidate you want to reach. **Choose a tactic:** seeking out candidates by “bird-dogging,” or co-sponsoring or hosting a candidates forum:

- **“Bird-dogging”**- follow, watch carefully, seek out candidates, pin them down with specific questions, and document their views. Work in teams of 2 - 4. Find out where candidates are speaking, show up and ask questions. Put yourself in the path of a candidate. Two types of bird-dogging: intercept -- stop them wherever they are and be prepared to ask questions, and at scheduled public events. See more details in Attachment #1.
- **Recruit team members. Roles:** Questioner(s), documenter, spokesperson, researcher.
- **Prepare a calendar of events.** Researcher(s) gather information. Follow candidates on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media to learn where they are publically appearing to raise your questions.
- **Host or Co-Host a candidate forum - This is a great way to engage the community and discern common issues.** Start four months out. Keep it nonpartisan. We strongly recommend that you partner with a credible organization with experience hosting forums and includes people most impacted by the issues. To ensure a successful turnout, include several co-sponsors. See attachment #2 -- Hosting A Candidate Forum and the More Resources section.

 **Research the candidates' positions.** Identify the candidates' issues and positions so you can customize your questions. If candidates are congressional incumbents, check their voting records at [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov). Go to trusted sources such as the League of Women Voters, Sierra Club, or American Association of University Women (AAUW) Action Fund to learn more about the candidates.

 **Prepare several questions in advance in writing.** Have several people to ask questions. For bird-dogging, personalize questions for each candidate. At a candidate forum, you may need to submit your question(s) in writing.

**Tips on asking questions.** Find more tips for speaking in public meetings in attachment #3.

- **Arrive early. Be prepared.** Ask questions early. Raise your hand high at forums and get in the path of the candidates as they pass. Get noticed. Work in teams.
- **Make your questions provocative without being rude.** Angry, rude or sarcastic questions may be ignored or counterproductive.
- **Keep questions short.** The longer you speak the less time for the candidate to talk and you will lose the audience.
- **Do not lecture.** If you must cite a fact or share a personal story frame your question, keep it on point, brief and compelling.
- **Agree ahead of time on who from your team will ask which question.**

**Additional Tips.**

- **Don't wear campaign buttons** supporting a candidate because they may reduce your chances of being called on. If you are hosting a forum, avoid wearing any political identifiers like buttons.
- **Don't speak for your congregation or any community other than yourself.** Unless you are an authorized representative. Don't wear clothing indicating your organization or congregation unless agreed to in advance.
- **Engage the media.** The spokesperson(s) should seek out reporters. Stay on message. Practice fielding questions.

**Document and share what you've learned.** Take video and share notes on the candidates' responses to your questions with your congregation, partners and allies. **Remember if you didn't document it, it didn't happen.**

**Other ways to be heard**

**Write a letter to the editor, a response to an article or a commentary.** Keep your responses short—150 words or less. **RAFT** Respond to recent reports. **Ask** for action. **Find** the facts. **Tie** it together (bring in your **personal connection or moral approach** to the issue.)

**Sponsor a *Write Here! Write Now!* Letter-writing campaign -- write individual or a joint letter to candidates.** Letters can show your concern and show candidates that we are paying attention. Ask their positions on your issues of concern and hand deliver letters to the legislator's local office. See the UUSJ WHWN letter-writing toolkit at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org) or link [here](#).



## Questions for Candidates

The sample questions in this Guide are intended to be used by individuals to ask questions at public venues. Although aimed at candidates for the US Congress, they can be adapted to address your specific state and local issues. **The questions are not intended to be used by moderators at your UU hosted or cohosted forums.**



**These sample questions focus on UUSJ's four priority issues:**

- Defending Our Democracy
- Economic Justice
- Environmental and Climate Justice
- Immigration Justice

Each issue section includes grounding in our Unitarian Universalist values and links to UU Actions of Immediate Witness and Statements of Conscience. While these questions are intended for congressional candidates, if you want to adapt and ask questions for state and local candidates look to the sources mentioned above to help ground your questions in our faith. Raising these questions helps establish groundwork for our UUSJ federal advocacy agenda.

**MEET  
THE  
CANDIDATES**



**Question:** In light of Russian interference in our 2016 elections, what will you do to secure U.S. elections from foreign interference?

**UU Perspective:** *The democratic process within society is a fundamental principle of UUs as reflected in our 5th Principle. The danger of foreign powers undermining our democratic process through interference with our electoral process is real and imminent. It is essential to protect our electoral process from foreign interference to maintain our democracy through improved training and electronic monitoring as well as requiring voting machines that provide a paper record.*

**Question:** Will you work with Congress to end extreme partisan gerrymandering by passing legislation that requires all states to form independent redistricting commissions?

**UU Perspective:** *The 2019 UUA Statement of Conscience “Our Democracy Uncorrupted” observed that gerrymandering in certain states has limited the electoral power of people of color and of political parties that are not in the majority. It can also push legislators further to the extremes, reducing the desire to cooperate or compromise. The 2019 Statement of Conscience recommends UU clusters, districts or state action networks study gerrymandering issues in their state(s) and provide advice on “recommended actions to ensure fair representation.”*

**Following are additional questions for your consideration:**

- *What is your plan for reducing the influence of big money in your campaign, for example by rejecting corporate PAC money, relying instead on small-donor contributions?*
- *Will you commit to real-time electronic disclosure of donations to your campaign, including the source of donations? (See the Federal Elections Commission for the candidate’s most recent campaign reports. <https://www.fec.gov>)*
- *Do you support a Constitutional amendment reversing the Supreme Court’s decision in Citizens United, which in effect shifts political power toward a small group of wealthy mega-donors? If so, do you believe it is enough to simply allow limits on corporate contributions, or do you think it also needs to address corporate constitutional rights by saying that money is not speech and corporations are not people?*



**Question:** How would you propose to ensure all people have access to quality, affordable healthcare? Would you require the mandatory inclusion of pre-existing conditions in all healthcare coverage?

**UU perspective:** UUs have long advocated for universal healthcare and the 2014 Statement of Conscience on Escalating Economic Inequity calls for action, Access to quality and affordable care, including coverage of pre-existing conditions, is essential to ensure a society where all have an opportunity for education and jobs and to create strong communities.

**Question:** Do you support extending Pell Grants to all incarcerated individuals?

**UU Perspective:** Our faith believes in the inherent worth and dignity of all people. As a way to give incarcerated persons back their dignity and sense of worth, Pell Grants can provide a second chance for people now in prison through education that gives them the tools to succeed and reduce their sentences. Through several Statements of Conscience over the years, UUs have supported criminal justice reform and other means to reduce mass incarceration.

**Following are additional questions for your consideration:**

- Many people cannot make cash bail for minor traffic offenses and other non-violent arrests. As a consequence they must spend time in jail, which means they cannot work or care for dependent family members, and they can lose jobs. What will you do to address this problem that keeps poor people down, reduces chances of economic success, and adds to the growing economic divide?
- The cost of higher education has skyrocketed 400% in 30 years, and student loan debt is now nearly 1.5 trillion dollars - the same amount of recent tax cuts to corporations. What will you do to make higher education, including technical school, more affordable and address the staggering burden of student-loan debt, so all students can contribute to the overall economy?
- Will you require that any future tax bill expands tax credits for low-income working families, including the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit?



**Question:** Would you support the use of a carbon fee and dividend, or similar approaches to pricing to reflect the true price of carbon, while protecting marginalized and low income communities?

**UU perspective:** Guided by our 2nd and 7th Principles to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part, UUs believe we have a moral responsibility to Earth, to all beings, and to future generations to do everything in our power to bring about a swift transition from fossil fuels to a sustainable energy economy. Carbon pricing is one of several legislative tools that can be used to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address injustices related to climate change. Revenue generated should be used to reduce climate impacts to vulnerable populations such as helping low- and middle-income households offset energy costs, increase community resilience to climate impacts, and facilitate a just transition to renewable sources of energy.

**Question:** Since international demand for renewable energy is expanding, what role should US public policy play to advance renewable energy technology and usage, like solar, wind, and geothermal?

**UU perspective:** UUs are guided by our 2nd and 7th Principles to affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. We believe we have a moral responsibility to Earth, to all beings, and to future generations to do everything in our power to bring about a swift transition from fossil fuels to a sustainable energy economy. The world's dependence on coal and petroleum comes at great cost to the environment and human health. US public investment in advanced technologies for renewable energy would demonstrate leadership as well as provide jobs, reduce dependence on fossil fuels, foster economic development, and improve our national security. We support moving away from subsidies for the fossil fuel sector and investing in renewable energy.

**Following are additional questions for your consideration:**

- What policies would you support for the transition to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and ensure prosperity and economic security for all people of the US?
- What changes do you support to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the next 10 years to avert a climate crisis?
- How would you address the adverse health effects of rolling back current EPA toxic chemical emission standards for power plants? These include increased incidence of asthma in children, lung and heart disease, and exposure to heavy metals and neurotoxins.



**Question:** Do you agree with the recent drastic reductions in the refugee resettlement ceiling from 85,000 in 2016 to 18,000 in 2020?

**UU perspective:** We believe the US has a moral responsibility to support refugees and that moral immigration policy would include the provision of asylum for refugees and others living in fear of violence or retribution regardless of religion.

**Question:** For those who cross our borders requesting asylum, do you believe that credible fear of gang violence, domestic violence, or harassment of LGBTQ individuals should be among the justifications for granting asylum?

**UU perspective:** We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and a peaceful, free and fair world for all. People fleeing countries that have a high level of gang-related violence-- in part the outcome of past US policies --deserve to be considered for asylum. Individuals who have suffered documented violence, discrimination, and harassment based on their sexual orientation must continue to be considered for asylum as should women and children who have a credible fear of death or injury from domestic abuse by their partners, family members or gang members.

**Following are additional questions for your consideration:**

- Do you support continued using for-profit contractors to provide facilities for immigrant detainees or community-based alternatives? And why?
- Do you consider the “remain in Mexico” or Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) policy that forces all migrants entering the US without documentation to wait in Mexico – even those seeking asylum -- a correct application of US and international asylum laws?
- Do you support legislation blocking the expansion of the failed detention and deportation system and shifting the focus to welcoming immigrants and refugees?



## Attachment #1

# Getting Candidates on the Record!

### Tips for Bird-Dogging Candidates to Ask Questions

During every election season, we have a unique opportunity to ask candidates questions that are important to UUs, and get them on the record and influence their opinions.

#### What is bird dogging?

✓ **Seek out candidates (and public office holders) wherever they are:** such as walking to their state or federal offices; shaking hands in a receiving line, at the grocery store, or public event like a candidate forum. Sometimes standing with a sign, picketing or marching is the only way to raise public and candidate awareness on your key issue.

✓ **Ask candidates where they stand on UU issues we care about.**

✓ **Document their responses and share them with the public to get candidates on the record!**

Bird-dogging can also generate media coverage that helps inform the public and gets exposure for your issues. If you don't document it, no one knows it happened. Share information widely.

Here are a few organizing tips and best practices adapted from the Friends Committee on National Legislation, American Friends Service Committee and Indivisible:

#### Bird-Dogging Game Plan

##### ✓ **Before:**

1. **Form a team or teams to prepare for and cover a candidate event.** You need 2-4 people per team. Roles include: **Questioners** - ask the questions; **Recorders** - document engagement with the candidate on video (at least a picture) and/or take notes to get them on the record. **Spokesperson** - to talk to the press; **Researchers** - conduct research or track candidates. You need at least two people on a team - a questioner and recorder.
2. **Check the candidate's schedule.** If it isn't on their campaign website, call their campaign office. Check out the [Town Hall Project](#) for public events of presidential candidates. Identify opportunities and create a calendar of candidate events.
3. **Do your research.** Get to know the candidate's position. Sign up for candidates' newsletters. Check out issue groups for voting records and congress.gov for US Congressional incumbents votes on legislation.
4. **Choose and practice your question(s).** Prepare your question. Write it down (at least two copies since written questions may need to be submitted at a candidate forum. Make it brief, personal, fact-based, and direct. Make it person by telling your story or providing local examples. Keep it short 100 words = about 1 minute. Practice until you can ask it without notes. Prepare a follow up. (See tips on what makes a good bird-dogging question at the end of the attachment. See Attachment #3 Tips for speaking at a public forum.)
5. **Bring visuals such as banners or signs.** Some team members may want to wear "statement" shirts. It's best that questioners leave the partisan and issue t-shirts at home. If you are hosting a forum, do not wear anything that is partisan.
6. **Plan your communications strategy** with team members. Prepare twitter handles and decide on tags to use. Consider high profile issue groups, and UU groups. Use: #UUTHEVOTE2020

7. **Huddle the day before or day of to coordinate** who will ask which question, and have everyone's text numbers.

✓ **During:**

8. **Arrive early.** If there's a question-and-answer session, you'll want to be close enough for the candidate to see and call on you. Raise your hand quickly and high.
9. **Ask your question early.** When candidates invite questions, most people will not immediately raise their hands. If you do, you're more likely to be called upon. Speak slowly and clearly. This helps the candidate, other attendees --including the media--can hear what you're saying.
10. **Be in the candidate's path.** Candidates often want to meet as many people as possible at events. This creates informal opportunity to ask a question as you're shaking their hand. Practice a short version of your question.
11. **Bring team members** or others with you for support and to record video and take pictures. Don't sit or stand together to improve chances that more than one of you will get to ask a question.
12. **Record your interaction.** Get the candidate on the record by having a friend record a video of your exchange. If that's not possible, write down the candidate's response.
13. **Be prepared to speak to the media.** Journalists often like to talk to someone who has asked the candidate a question, or have a designated spokesperson. Stay on message and talk about the issue you asked about. Seek out reporters.

✓ **After:**

14. **Debrief as soon as possible.** Review what went well, and what didn't. Identify obstacles and determine improvements or changes for next time. Identify a good bird-dogging example that might help recruit others.
15. **Share what you've learned.** Post your video, pictures or comments on social media Facebook and Twitter! Use tags and Take pictures. Include (UUA, UUSJ, UUSC UU the Vote, Side with Love tags) on your posts. The UUSJ website's advocacy page include a link to Twitter accounts for Members of Congress. **Remember if you didn't document it, it didn't happen.**

✓ **Checklist for questions:** What makes a good bird-dogging question? Adapted from AFSC. Download it here [AFSC bird-dogging question checklist](#).

<b>A good question:</b>	<b>What to avoid:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Focuses on a particular issue</li> <li>✓ Is concise</li> <li>✓ Puts candidate on the spot</li> <li>✓ Informs listeners, including reporters</li> </ul> <p><b>A better question, make it personal.</b></p> <p><b>Mention:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Personal stories</li> <li>+ Local facts</li> <li>+ Candidate's voting record and quotes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Softball questions, like "What do you think about...?"</li> <li>✗ Multi-issue questions</li> <li>✗ Rambling questions</li> <li>✗ Long questions</li> <li>✗ Overly-complex or technical questions</li> <li>✗ Using unfamiliar acronyms</li> </ul>



# Hosting A Candidate Forum: Checklist and Timeline *(adapted from Nonprofit VOTE)*

### ✓ **4 MONTHS TO GO:**

- Identify other organizations as partners or co-sponsors
- Set date, time, and place for the forum
- Decide on a forum format
- Develop a forum budget

### ✓ **3 MONTHS TO GO:**

- Invite the candidates. Find the best contact to confirm and brief them
- Send invitations and do follow up
- Create a communications plan

### ✓ **2 MONTHS TO GO:**

- Create and start a plan for turnout
- Begin volunteer recruitment
- Select a moderator
- Start publicity
- Continue follow up with candidates

### ✓ **1 MONTH TO GO:**

- Final confirmation of candidates
- Reconfirm site arrangements
- Reconfirm volunteers
- Continue outreach and publicity
- Reconfirm moderator

### ✓ **LESS THAN 1 MONTH:**

- Build your audience! Continue to recruit attendees
- Contact volunteers to confirm their duties at the forum
- Ramp up communications
- Finalize forum logistics - Select a timekeeper

### ✓ **DAY OF THE EVENT:**

- Complete set-up at forum
- Have staff or volunteers greet people
- Set up the head table
- Review ground rules for forum
- Make sure your name is prominent for photos and video
- Have a sign-in list for names, emails or phone numbers
- Allow time for informal mixing after the forum

### ✓ **AFTER THE EVENT**

- Send thank-yous to candidates, the moderator and co-sponsors
- Follow up with coverage and highlights to your allies and audience

## Attachment #3

# Tips for Speaking at a Public Forum and Getting Your Questions Answered



## **A Guide to the Theater of Speaking In Public Meetings**

Speaking in a public meeting is like a performance. You are not only performing for the candidate, but for the entire community audience (and press). With this in mind, we offer the following suggestions:

- ✓ Keep questions short. 1 minute = 100 words. The longer you speak the more of your audience you will lose, and the less time the candidates will have to talk.
  - ✓ Do not lecture. If you must cite a fact or share a personal story to set up your question, keep it on point, brief and as compelling as possible.
  - ✓ Make your questions provocative without being rude.
  - ✓ Be compassionate and show it in your tone of voice. Extend this compassion to the candidates as well as the audience.
  - ✓ Your lead-in statement should be passionate and thoughtful - speak from your heart.
  - ✓ Cold anger and grief are appropriate only for very personal narratives.
  - ✓ Relax, smile and be friendly. Take time to breathe deeply before speaking, even if your heart is pounding.
  - ✓ Practice what you're going to say in front of a mirror, with loved ones, and even before a video camera if possible. Review the video noting body language and tone of voice, etc., in addition to the content of your message.
  - ✓ Write your questions out in advance. It's possible that you will have to submit your question in writing.
  - ✓ You'll only have the opportunity to ask one question, so have a backup question in case someone else asks a similar question.
- 
- ✓ Unless you are an authorized representative, do not speak for your congregation or any community other than yourself.
  - ✓ If you are going in a group, agree in advance on which questions are most important to ask and decide who will ask which questions. Some people might want to bring signs.
- 
- ✓ Dress appropriately. No political buttons or shirts. Keep it nonpartisan.
  - ✓ A sea of "Side with Love" T-shirts makes quite an impression. However, if you do not own and cannot acquire one, err on casual business attire if you don't have a sense of what others are likely to wear.

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## More Resources

### More resources and acknowledgement for sources we drew on:



**“Write Here! Write Now!” letter-writing campaign for democracy reform toolkit.** Many UU congregations across the country use this toolkit to write letters to their Members of Congress on key issues, which UUSJ’s Capitol Hill Advocacy Corps then delivers to Capitol Hill, often in face-to-face meetings with Congressional staff. The toolkit is available on our website at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org). Questions? Contact [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org).

- **“UUs Mobilizing for the 2020 Election”** webpage, with links to voter mobilization, GOTV and other resources including congregational tabling signage, sign-up forms, etc. Link to website from the home page at [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org) and the Advocacy pull down menu.
- Advocacy resources visit UUSJ [www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org) and link to the **“Advocacy”** tab.
- **UU the Vote** [www.uuthevote.org](http://www.uuthevote.org), and **UU the Vote Team Building Toolkit** will help you get started.
- **Hosting a Candidates Forum** - our three favorites. All have sections on keeping your forum nonpartisan. These were resources for our guide.
  - **Hosting A Candidate Forum: Step-by-step guide for planning, publicizing and hosting a candidates forum.** (17 pgs.) [www.NonprofitVote.org](http://www.NonprofitVote.org) go to resources/engaging candidates ([more toolkits and checklists](#) some in Spanish)
  - **Guide to Hosting a Successful Candidate Forum for 501(c)(3)s.** Good section on what you can and can NOT ask candidates and a wonderful chart on what you can and can NOT do as part of your candidate forum. (14-pgs.) [www.advocacyandcommunication.org](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org)
  - **How to Organize a Candidate Forum.** American Association of University Women (AAUW) <https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-candidate-forum/> (2-pgs.)
- **Bird-dogging** - resources for our Guide:
  - **Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL-Quakers) Bird-Dogging Guide.** <https://www.fcnl.org/updates/bird-dogging-guide-252> Short and to the point.
  - **American Friends Service Committee Your Guide to Bird-dogging**
  - **Indivisible - Bird-dogging Language Guidance and Bird-Dogging Guide**
- **How to Write Letters to the Editor or OP ED-** [VoteRider](#), [FCNL](#) - faith perspective. Has a tool to look up local newspapers.

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We hope you have found this Guide helpful. We will continue our UUSJ federal public policy advocacy work throughout the year, and will hold our elected officials accountable. If you would like to join our letter-writing campaign or participate in our Defending Our Democracy work or other issue work, please contact us. Send comments, questions and suggestions to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org).

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