

How to Host a Meet the Candidates Night

Committee: Legislative

Contact Information for Questions:legislative@ALAforVeterans.org

Encourage and empower members to be more knowledgeable to act on The American Legion's legislative priorities.

Step-by-Step Instructions: A “meet the candidate” night is a question-and-answer session where all candidates for a specific election are invited to answer questions. It is not intended to be a debate.

Suggested Date of Event: 2-3 weeks before elections.

3 Months Prior to the Event

1. To make this a Legion Family event, work with your Legion post, SAL squadron, and Riders chapter (if applicable) to form a planning committee. If this isn't a Legion Family event, the unit Legislative chair and unit president should appoint a planning committee. Identify the place, date, and time for the event. Map out a plan to get the word out to the general community. Think about whether you'll serve refreshments; will they be donated or do you need to buy them? Set guidelines for candidates before the event about literature, political signs, and handouts.
 - o If the place is the post home, ensure you have approval for the space and it's on the calendar. Determine if your post allows political material (like signs) to be displayed on post property.
2. After the candidate filing deadline has passed, pull a list of candidates from your state's election board or Supervisor of Elections' website. Prepare a spreadsheet of all ballot-ready candidates (local, state and/or federal) who will be invited. List their name, address, phone, email, party, and office. Allow ample time to contact them and receive their response.
3. Mail and email invitation letters with Legion Family Point of Contact name and the deadline date to reply. Remember: The Legion Family is nonpartisan, so you need to invite **ALL** candidates. Follow up periodically with candidates who have not replied. Suggest to the candidate that they send another representative if there is a conflict in their scheduling.

2 Months Prior

1. The planning committee arranges for volunteers for the following roles:
 - o Moderator (1) – Someone impartial and ideally not a part of the Legion Family, such as local news reporter or radio host or someone known and respected by the community. Using someone on TV or radio also ensures that it will be announced on TV/radio.
 - o Timekeeper (1) – To keep everyone on track. Each candidate should get an equal amount of time each round.
 - o Legion Family Ambassadors (Several) – To staff a table on programs and services your Legion Family offers. They should also have membership applications on hand.
 - o Servers (Several) – Have a small team of volunteers serve refreshments.



- Crowd Control (Several) – Volunteers to ensure that no attendee gets out of control. (Legion Family Sergeants at Arms might be great for this role).
- Screeners (Several) - Volunteers to collect and review questions from attendees. Selected questions will be given to the moderator for a Q&A period. *Note: Candidates can stay after talking with people and address their issues.
- Public Relations Coordinator (1) – Someone who will ensure that event is advertised in local newspapers, social media, websites, and any other media outlet. They might invite a radio station or local TV station to stream the event live. (They might form a team to help promote the event on social media, create a hashtag, etc.).

2. The planning committee sets an agenda and how the event will proceed. Depending on the number of candidates in attendance, allow time for opening and closing speeches for each (this could be 2 to 3 minutes). After opening speeches and introductions, the moderator will ask for questions (that have been screened).
 - If question is to a particular candidate, allow 1-2 minutes for the answer and allow opposing candidate the same amount of time. There should be no rebuttals!
 - If it is a general question, the moderator can ask any candidate to address, but again only 1-2 minutes per candidate.

Day of Event

1. Set up the room with the candidates in front of the audience.
2. Prepare tent cards for all candidates with their name, party, and the office they're seeking. You may wish to seat candidates alphabetically to not show favoritism.
3. Set up a table to talk about the programs and services your Legion Family offers. They should also have membership applications on hand and other Legion Family branded information.
4. Setup a table for voter registration¹. Members of your Americanism committee might be good to man this table, or you can invite an outside organization, like the League of Women Voters to help with the voter registration.

After the Event

1. Follow up with thank you notes to all the candidates who participated.
2. If media did not attend, work with your Public Relations chair to send pictures to be published and posted on social media.