Guidance for Establishing Your Debate Format

There are several different ways you could set up your debate. The format you select will depend on:

(a) the number of participating candidates;
(b) the scheduled length of your debate;
(c) the number of questions you wish to pose;
(d) the skill and technical experience of your moderator;
(e) the atmosphere you wish to create;
(f) the extent to which you want to encourage a "true debate."

Another crucial factor will be whether your debate is happening **in-person** or **online**. If your debate is happening in-person, you may find it easier to have back-and-forth between candidates. On the other hand, online debates may benefit from a more structured format in case of technical issues or lags.

There are many other components you could add to your debate's format if you have enough time. Note that the more participants, the less time there will be to hear each candidate's ideas. While these debates should be fun and engaging for audiences, it should also be manageable for debate organizers and candidates. The more complicated your format is, the more aspects there will be for your team and moderator to oversee.

While you could opt for a more traditional **long-form debate** (where candidates respond to all questions in a similarly structured format), we encourage you to explore how to create a debate that's more engaging and interesting for the audience. We'll provide a number of options you could consider to make your debate more dynamic, including: changing up the question format; offering candidates the chance for elaboration or rebuttal; or selecting candidates to have a 1-on-1 debate on specific questions. In planning your debate format, make sure to consider where there are moments to create a **"true debate"** where candidates actively respond to one another rather than simply recite prepared answers.

This guide will provide you with some ideas about how to structure your debate. This is not intended to be prescriptive, since each debate should be *tailored* to each organizers' goal and *dynamic* (rather than tightly structured).

General tips for a smooth debate:
- Randomly determine the order in which candidates will make introductions, respond to questions, and provide concluding remarks before the debate begins. Have the Moderator explain that a **random order** was established for each of these sections to indicate impartiality..

- If a candidate has declined your invite, cancels, or does not show, **let attendees know they were invited**. Tell audience members why they had to decline only if asked to. Be respectful of any candidate that doesn't attend.
- Appoint a **timekeeper** to support the moderator. Establish a system to notify the moderator when time is up (e.g., yellow card means 15 seconds left, red card means time is up).
- Need ideas for **local debate questions**? Consider asking a local ENGO, business, etc. for a suggestion. This can help ensure your questions are relevant to your community and also attract attendees from that organization's network.
- Help keep your debate on time by having **audience members** submit their questions *ahead of the event* via email or an app like Sli.do (just ask for this on your event page). Questions can then be gathered and vetted by members of your team and provided to the moderator to pose to the candidates. This allows organizers to sift out questions that are blatantly partisan, and helps avoid a flood of questions that might make the debate dominated by a single issue.
    - If taking <u>live</u> questions:
        - *In-person debates*: Tell audience members as they arrive that they can write down their questions, and where to drop them off. During the start of the debate, make sure to have the moderator remind them that they can submit questions. You can assign team members to sift through these questions and select the best bunch for the moderator to ask.
        - *Virtual debates*: Tell audience members as they join the meeting that they can ask questions using the chat/Q&A function. Ensure that the moderator repeats this once the debate officially starts. Assign a team member to sift through these questions as they come in.
- Set **Points of Order** that the Moderator will uphold. Explain these to the candidates before your debate and have the moderator tell the audience what they are during the introduction. These include:
    - The *moderator's* right to interrupt when:
        - A candidate goes over time limit
        - A candidate brings up a wholly new topic during a rebuttal or open conversation
        - A candidate behaves aggressively or disrespectfully (e.g., hostile finger pointing, inappropriate attacks on personality, uses abusive words)
    - The right for candidates to *interrupt the moderator* when:
        - The moderator forgets to ask a candidate a question
        - The moderator goes out of the pre-set question order
        - The moderator forgets to ask for rebuttals/responses/wild cards
        - The moderator does not follow planned timeline for each discussion
- Set **Rules of Decorum** for the audience and post them at the entrance to the debate. Have the moderator remind the audience that they will be upheld during the introduction.

You should assume that your debate will be around 1.5–2 hours long. If you're planning out a schedule that breaks down each section to the minute, make sure to include a buffer for the unexpected (e.g., technical/sound issues, candidates asking for clarification on the questions, candidates running overtime, volunteer team walking questions up to moderator/panel).

General Debate Format

This is a simplified outline of how your debate format may look. Some sections (i.e., the Land Acknowledgement, Moderator Introduction) will be more consistent across debates, while others (i.e., the question-asking period) will be subject to change depending on your goals and/or preferences. If you're looking for a more detailed agenda on how the debate may run, check out the sample <u>Debate Scripts</u> appended to this document.

<u>Land Acknowledgement</u>

Begin by acknowledging the land and/or territory your debate is taking place on, and emphasize the importance of recognizing this in the context of debates on the environment and other priority issues. Use this resource to [determine the land you reside on](#), and this resource on [how to build a land acknowledgement](#).

<u>Organizer Introduction</u>

Briefly describe your organization(s) (if applicable) and your reason for organizing this debate. This should take no longer than a few minutes.

<u>Moderator Introduction</u>

Have the moderator introduce themselves, their qualifications, and set the tone of the debate. This should include the following:

- ***Non-Partisan, All-Candidates Debate***: explain that all candidates from the major parties were invited to attend, and announce which ones are and are not in attendance.
- ***Moderator Points of Order***: explain the Moderator Points of Order that will be upheld during the debate.
- ***Rules of Decorum***: explain the rules of engagement to the audience, including:
    - Entitlement to freedom from harassment or other forms of adverse treatment for all debate participants (audiences, candidates, and organizers);
    - Refraining from off-topic discussions/side conversations;
    - The right for organizers to remove any participant as a result of their conduct.
- ***Randomization***: explain that candidates will be asked to introduce themselves, respond to questions, and provide closing remarks in a random order.
- ***Debate Format***: explain how the rest of the debate will progress, including the types of questions that will be asked and response formats for each question.

<u>Candidate Introduction</u>

Provide each candidate with approximately 1 minute for an introductory statement. They should explain who they are, why they are running, and/or why they are participating in the debate.

Questions Period

This is the section that will be most subject to change. While the *types* of questions will be more or less the same across debates, the way in which you ask candidates to respond to them can vary.

Question Types

Pre-Set Debate Questions: These are the questions that will be sent out to candidates in advance of the debates. They will generally focus on the major national, provincial, and local environment-related issues facing all voters, including linkages to health, the economy, and more. There should be about 6-8 of these questions asked in the debate.

Pre-Submitted Audience Questions: These are the questions that you will have attendees submit ahead of the event. Depending on how much time you have and how you have candidates respond to them (see "Formatting Your Questions" below), there will probably be anywhere from 2-4 of these questions during your debate. This will be on the lower end if you're also taking live audience questions.

Live Audience Questions: These are the questions that attendees will submit during the event (i.e., by writing down on a piece of paper and leaving in a box somewhere in the venue room.)

Formatting Your Questions

Formal Response: This is the most common format for having candidates respond to questions, where each candidate gets about 1-3 minutes to pose an answer to the question asked. These can be a reliable format to use for most of your questions. However, keep in mind that there may not be as much opportunity for a true "debate" among candidates if you only provide them time to speak *individually* rather than with one another. If you want to include the opportunity for rebuttals, you can add 1-2 minutes for candidates to reply to what others have said after everyone's provided an initial response.

Rapid-Fire: This can be an exciting way for candidates to quickly summarize their stance on or plans to address a specific issue. You can give candidates anywhere from 30 seconds to as little as 10 seconds to respond to a question to see what they plan to prioritize when addressing a certain problem. Alternatively, you can have candidates debate with *one another* on a specific question (rather than provide individual responses) in a short time frame – around 1 minute – to get an engaging, quick-fire discussion going.

Yes/No Questions: Ask questions where candidates may only respond with "yes" or "no". This requires candidates to clearly state their stance on certain issues and/or projects that the constituency can hold them to, should they be elected.

Open Discussion: After a certain set of questions, you could open the floor for candidates to freely comment on what has just been discussed. This gives candidates the chance to elaborate further on a point they brought up or debate directly with one another, rather than answer questions independently.

Setting the Format: Ideas for Encouraging a "True Debate"

It can feel intimidating, but try to create a "true debate" where candidates directly engage with one another – rather than a forum for candidates to recite prepared answers. This can feel a little harder to manage, but with some basic ground rules (including the Points of Order), the moderator should be able to keep things on track. Here's some ideas about how you can set that tone:

Dividing Up the Debate: Have a select number of candidates debate on a specific question. This works best if you have at least 3 candidates so you can get a chance for everyone to debate with someone different. It may look something like this:
- Question #1: Debate between Candidate A and Candidate B
  - 30 seconds for Candidate A to pose
  - 30 seconds for Candidate B to pose
  - 30 seconds for Candidate A response
  - 30 seconds for Candidate B response
- Question #2: repeat this process between Candidates C and D, but with a new question

If you have 3 candidates, you could ask 3 questions in this format and change around the order each time so that each candidate gets the chance to debate with the other two – i.e., Candidate A and C, then Candidate B and C, then Candidate A and B. As with the other questions you ask, make sure to **randomly select** the order in which candidates respond, and randomly select the candidates that debate with one another.

Wild Card: If you're not as comfortable with the previous format, you can have candidates drive the debate themselves using the "Wild Card" format. This is where you offer candidates a certain number of chances to speak for an additional minute on any question they want, either to **elaborate** (build on what they're saying) or provide a **rebuttal** to another candidate's response.
- Have the moderator note at the beginning that they will ask candidates if they want to use a Wild Card after all the other candidates have responded.
- If you're using Wild Cards in your debate, this should **replace** the time you allow for candidates to reply that you would've otherwise structured into each question. This will

make candidates use their Wild Cards more strategically, since they will only have a limited number of opportunities to elaborate or reply to another candidate's remarks.

Closing Statements

Provide each candidate approximately 1–2 minutes to give closing remarks. This will be their space to emphasize how the topics discussed relate to central components of their campaign, and should wrap-up the debate in a reflective manner.

Sample Debate Agenda / "Run of Show" #1

Use this sample format to your liking as inspiration for your debate format.

- "X min to pose" = amount of time candidates have to offer their initial response
- # of candidates: 4
- Questions organized by area they cover (national/provincial, local...)

Section	Details	Lead (including order of candidate responses)	Length (min)	Running Time
Organizer Introduction		John (lead organizer)	2	2
Moderator Introduction + Land Acknowledgement		Tina (moderator)	3	5
Candidate Introductions	1 min / candidate	**Order**: Gary, Wendy, Sam, Abigail (candidates)	4	9
Pre-set Debate Questions (national/provincial topics)	**2 questions**: *Formal response* 2 min to pose **2 questions**: *Rapid-Fire/Yes-No* 15 seconds to pose	**Question reader:** Tina **Order**: Sam, Abigail, Gary, Wendy	20	29
Pre-set Debate Questions (local questions)	**1 question**: *Formal response* 2 min to pose 1 min reply / candidate	**Question reader:** Tina **Order**: Wendy, Sam, Abigail, Gary	13	42
Pre-set Debate Questions (local questions)	**2 questions**: *1-on-1* Candidates debate in sets of 2 30 seconds /candidate 30 seconds reply / candidate	**Question reader:** Lucy (local org representative) **1-on-1 groups:** Question 1: Sam and Wendy, Abigail and Gary Question 2: Wendy and Abigail, Gary and Sam	10	52
Audience Questions	**2 questions**: *Formal response* 2 min to pose **2 questions**: *Open discussion* 5 min / question	**Question readers**: Tina, audience members (if applicable) **Order**: Abigail, Gary, Wendy, Sam	28	80
Concluding remarks	2 min / candidate	**Order**: Wendy, Sam, Abigail, Gary	8	88

Moderator wrap up	2 min	Tina	2	90

Sample Debate Agenda / "Run of Show" #2

Use this sample format to your liking as inspiration for your debate format.

- "X min to pose" = amount of time candidates have to offer their initial response
- # of candidates: 3
- **ADDITIONAL NOTE**: Debate follows a "Wild Card" format where candidates have 3 opportunities to use a "Wild Card" after everyone has responded to the question. After each question, the Moderator should ask each candidate *if they would like to use one of their Wild Cards* to provide further elaboration on their response or a rebuttal to something another candidate said.
- Questions organized by "topic" covered in each question/set of questions (i.e. toxics, climate change, urban sprawl, reconciliation...) rather than by area they cover

Section	Details	Lead (including order of candidate responses)	Length (min)	Running Time
Organizer Introduction		John (lead organizer)	2	2
Moderator Introduction + Land Acknowledgement		Tina (moderator)	3	5
Candidate Introductions	1 min / candidate	**Order**: Gary, Wendy, Sam (candidates)	3	8
Topic #1	**1 question**: 2 min to pose / candidate	**Question reader:** Tina **Order**: Wendy, Sam, Gary	7	15
Topic #2	**Question #1:** 2 min reply / candidate **Question #2**: 1 min / candidate	**Question reader:** Tina **Order**: Sam, Gary, Wendy	11	26
Topic #3	**Question #1:** 2 min to pose / candidate	**Question reader:** Tina **Question #1 order:** Gary, Wendy, Sam	7	33
Topic #4	**1 question:** 1 min to pose / candidate	**Question reader**: Tina **Order**: Wendy, Sam, Gary	4	37
Topic #5	**1 question:** 2 min to pose /	**Question reader**: Tina	7	44

	candidate	**Order**: Sam, Gary, Wendy		
Topic #6	**1 question:** 2 min to pose / candidate	**Question reader:** Tina **Order:** Gary, Wendy, Sam	7	51
Topic #7	**Question #1:** 1 min to pose / candidate **Question #2:** 2 min to pose / candidate	**Question reader**: Tina **Question #1 order:** Wendy, Sam, Gary **Question #2 order**: Gary, Sam, Wendy	11	62
Topic #8	**Question #1:** 2 min to pose / candidate	**Question reader**: Tina **Question #1 order:** Sam, Gary, Wendy	7	69
Audience Questions	**1 question** 1 min to pose / candidate	**Question readers:** Tina (reading pre-submitted question) **Order:** Wendy, Gary, Sam	5	74
Additional Time (Wild Cards)	After each question is asked, the Moderator should ask candidates (in the same order as the questions) if the candidates would like to use a Wild Card (1 minute for extra elaboration/rebuttal to other candidate's statements.) **3 Wild Cards / candidate** 1 min rebuttal or elaboration / Wild Card	**Moderator**: Tina	9	83
Concluding remarks	2 min / candidate	**Order**: Sam, Wendy, Gary	6	89
Moderator wrap up	1 min	Tina	1	90