

# ORGANIZER'S TOOLKIT



2021 Virtual Debates

**100 DEBATES**  
on  
the **ENVIRONMENT**

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## WHY ORGANIZE A VIRTUAL DEBATE?

**We are organizing non-partisan all-candidate debates on the environment in 100 ridings across Canada.**

Debates are often seen as defining moments in elections. As we saw when we did this in the 2019 Federal Election, holding 100 debates nationwide cuts through the noise and puts the environment front and centre at a time when it matters most. We will aim to hold all debates during a common time period, most likely a 3-day window, so we can draw attention to them.

To pull it off, we are working with a passionate network of local leaders like you, who are spearheading virtual debates in their communities. These debates are intended to be welcoming and politically neutral – a peaceful forum to bring voters together at the riding level to hear candidates' best policy ideas for the environment. **Two thirds of Canadians think that climate change is as serious a problem as the coronavirus.**

With organizers like you, we can facilitate the important conversations surrounding the environment by ensuring the politicians who want our votes know they need to make the environment a priority.

This **toolkit** is a guide to hosting a great virtual debate in your riding. It has been written for everyone, with all levels of organizing experience. It is a comprehensive package that walks you through all the steps needed for you and your team to make your virtual debate a success. If you would like to host an in-person debate, our 2019 toolkit is also available on the portal as a guide. If at any stage of the process you are unsure about the instructions or how to go about achieving them, feel free to contact our team. Our team can be reached at [100debates@greenpac.ca](mailto:100debates@greenpac.ca). Organizers will have access

**Thank you for being a debate organizer! We are so glad to have your help and leadership on the debates – it'll be critical for the project's success! If you have any questions, check out our FAQs or contact our team at [100debates@greenpac.ca](mailto:100debates@greenpac.ca) – we're here to help!**

to the 100 Debates' **online organizer portal**. It is packed with all the resources you'll need to put on a great virtual debate. Check the portal frequently for updates and new materials, some of which will include:

- Frequently Asked Questions
- A debate-day checklist
- A project workplan
- Media templates and strategy
- Promotional materials
- Brand materials such as the 100 Debates logo for public use
- Debate format and moderator's handbook

## CRITICAL INFO

### 01. Date

All debates will be held within a 3-day window to be determined when the writ drops.

### 02. Focus

All debates should have questions that focus on major environmental issues. Organizers are encouraged to add additional environment-related questions on issues that are important in your communities.

### 03. Non-Partisan

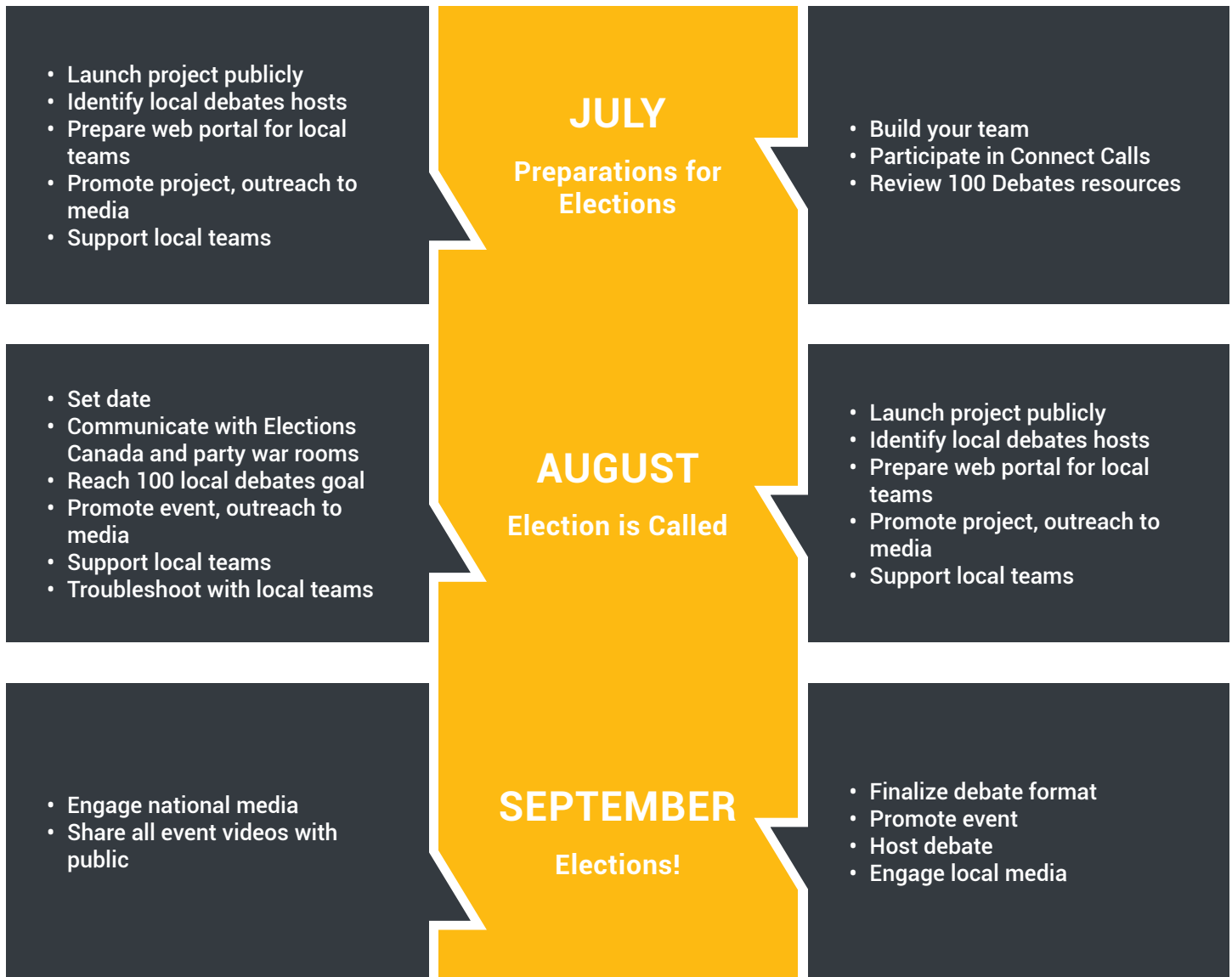
Candidates from all major political parties must be invited and the debates can't favour any party or candidate in any way. This includes in the format of the debates, the choice of moderator, and in how the debate is promoted and communicated. Similarly, as an organizer, you should be publicly non-partisan (i.e. not working on a campaign or having recently run for a party).

# TIMELINE OVERVIEW

This is a suggested timeline given the uncertain timing of the snap election. You may choose to condense your schedule if you join after July.

## 100 DEBATES TEAM

## LOCAL DEBATES TEAM



# HOW TO ORGANIZE A VIRTUAL DEBATE

## STEP 1 BUILD A TEAM

Even small teams can accomplish big things. Here's how to build your team:

### CONTACT MAPPING

#### 01. Identify helpful people, organizations and businesses

Make a list of everyone who might help organize a virtual debate in your riding noting their skills, interests, activities, focus, and availability.

#### 02. Highlight your A list

Assess which individuals/organizations have the skills, time and resources that will be most helpful. A bigger team can lessen everyone's load but you only need a few people to plan and execute a digital event.

#### #OrganizingTip

Some good options could include friends and family, environmental groups, grassroots groups, student associations, unions, chambers of commerce, community service organizations, faith groups and others for whom the environment is an important issue – groups with access to some of the tools you need such as a Business Zoom account or a built in network are especially great. We will facilitate connections with other organizers in your riding who sign up.

### OUTREACH

#### 01. Send an email

It should quickly explain the project and ask for a quick virtual meeting or phone call (see organizer portal for a sample email – tailor it for each recipient).

#### 02. Meeting/call prep

- Think about the issues your meeting partner cares most about (e.g. climate change, health, transit, climate justice, education, water, biodiversity).
- Think about how this virtual debate could help elevate these issues.
- Imagine how you're going to ask for their help. It's best to be direct. For example "Would you be willing to promote our event with your sponsors, followers and channels?"

#### 03. The meeting/call

- Introduce the project, talk about the skills you're looking for and how this person could help.
- Ask if you can count on their help.
- Establish next steps (e.g. setting up a next virtual meeting).

It is important to be clear from the start on who is doing what. This works best when you effectively use the interests, experience and talents of those on your team to create roles and responsibilities that will help everyone achieve their shared purpose. **Here are some suggested roles:**

#### Team Leader

Drives the project forward, coordinates team activities, logistics, finds a moderator, checks in with the Green-PAC team.

#### Communications Lead

Coordinates the team's event promotion, social media, digital technology, video, photography, and media relations. Could also schedule weekly meetings, check-ins and progress meetings.

#### Political Lead

Coordinates with local candidates (i.e. sends them the invite and debate questions; confirms candidates attendance and answers any questions that come up).

#### Community Lead

Finds and coordinates community partners to help promote and/or partner on the event and coordinates volunteers to help with key tasks (e.g. promotion).

# IDENTIFY THE DEBATE HOST/ MODERATOR

The moderator will play a critical, public-facing role in the debate. It is crucial to secure an engaging moderator and plan for a backup if needed. Finding and preparing the debate moderator is an important step. A moderator keeps the debate on track, introduces candidates and the purpose of the debates, notes housekeeping rules, poses questions, and closes off the debate. It is important to choose the right person for the role who is charismatic, comfortable with the role, and able to interject as needed to steer the conversation in the right direction while being respectful and engaging. They must also be:

## 01. Neutral

They need to be committed to managing the debate fairly for all parties. They can't be (or be perceived to be) associated with any party. The credibility of the moderator will influence the credibility of the debate.

## 02. Comfortable with public speaking

They will need to ask questions, address the audience and potentially deliver an opening statement.

## 03. Comfortable with moderating

They may have to interrupt candidates to keep the debate on schedule and to ensure all candidates are given the same amount of time to speak.

### #OrganizingTip

Professional backgrounds well-suited to debate moderation are local journalists, professors, teachers, lawyers. These are just suggestions – if you need help finding a moderator, contact the GreenPAC team. See our moderator's handbook on the portal for more tips.

Plan at least 2 meetings with the moderator and substitute moderator before the debate. It is important to keep both of them involved in the process and have a plan in place in case the moderator is unable to make it. Two weeks before your debate, meet your moderator and substitute alongside your debate day team to go through a dress rehearsal of the debate.

## OTHER ROLES TO CONSIDER

### 01. Techie

Sets up the online platform and ensures that the tech is running smoothly, starts a live stream, ensures the debate is recorded either to the cloud or locally to their computer. They will ensure that attendees are managed closely to prevent anyone from spontaneously derailing or interrupting.

### 02. Zoom Monitor

Monitors the chat box (if you opt to use it), keeps a list of the questions and comments audience members have, manages attendance and ensures that no one is taken off mute. Will respond to any questions in the chat box and keep a lively conversation going. This person can also start the conversation going in the chat with introductions, candidate bios and other pre-planned content.

### 03. Social Media Guru/Comms Manager

Posts real-time content on social media platforms and monitors the live stream. Depending on how many platforms you might be using for social media and live streaming, this role can be shared amongst various individuals by platform to avoid confusion.

### 04. Timekeeper

Helps the moderator to keep the candidates on track within the tight agenda timeline.

Make sure you have a communication channel for your team which is separate from the online streaming, such as Slack or a messaging group. Having a separate channel for your team alone will provide a space to coordinate internally while your event is ongoing. This can be the same channel used for your regular team communications but it is important to keep it separate from the online event to prevent any communication incidents. Make sure you mute the noise from any messages if it is connected to your laptop, but that you are still able to read quick updates while streaming.

## STEP 2 INVITE CANDIDATES

There are probably many candidates running in your riding, including from smaller parties and independents. Candidates from each of the 5 parties represented in Parliament must be invited, if a candidate is running in your riding. These parties include: the Liberal Party of Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada, the New Democratic Party, the Green Party of Canada and the Bloc Québécois. The candidate is not required to be present, but you must be able to demonstrate that you sent an invitation and gave them every opportunity to attend. We recognize that every riding is unique, and you are free to invite other candidates, including a candidate

from a party that does not have a representative in Parliament. However, for the sake of consistency and maintaining a manageable format for the debate, we generally recommend that you stick to the major parties present in the House of Commons. Candidates from smaller, unrepresented parties will likely not like this rule, but it is consistent with how many debates are run, including national leaders debates. Guidelines laying out specific criteria for candidate inclusion will be available for reference in the organizer portal. Candidates should only be invited to debates in their own ridings.

**The central campaigns of all major parties will be told about the debates but we need to make sure local candidates show up. [Here's how:](#)**

1. Search for candidates running in your riding and their contact information.
2. Invite the sitting MP (if they're running again).
3. Call local campaign offices from all other major parties. Explain the project. Ask to whom you should email an invite.
4. Tailor the template invitation (see organizer portal) so that it applies to your riding. Email and mail the invite. Doing both will make sure it gets seen.
5. Call the campaign offices to make sure the email has been received or drop a hard copy off in person – they'd love to speak to you!
6. Follow up by phone every week if you haven't received a response and continue following up until you hear back.
7. Take notes on all interactions with parties. Include the name of the person you spoke with and the date and time. This will help with follow-up and will be proof that the project is non-partisan.
8. Stay tuned for new nominations in your riding. Some ridings pick candidates really close to the election.
9. Let us know when candidates confirm their attendance so we can update the map on our events page.

### #OrganizingTip

Track confirmed candidates [here](#) or using other databases you know of. If you find useful resources, please share with the GreenPAC team and fellow debate organizers.

## STEP 3 SET THE FORMAT FOR THE DEBATE

Visit the organizers portal for our suggested debate format.

### BEFORE THE DEBATE, YOU SHOULD:

#### 01. Send all candidates the debate questions with their invite to participate

This will help show them that the debate will be non-partisan and may increase the likelihood that they agree to participate.

#### 02. Prepare additional questions on local issues

All questions should be written in a neutral way that doesn't favour any candidate. These questions should be sent to candidates when ready.

#### 03. Plan at least one virtual meeting with each candidate separately

Discuss the debate format and review questions. Remind them the virtual debate will be livestreamed and posted afterward.

#### 04. Let candidates know that the order will be randomized

Organizers should randomly select the candidate who will provide their opening remarks first and closing remarks first. Make sure to explain this process in advance

Plan for the debate to take 2 hours. We strongly encourage all debates to follow the same format and to include the following sections:

#### 01. General Environmental Questions

These questions are based on the major, nationwide, environmental issues. Asking these at the beginning of the debate will help to forge a national narrative on critical environmental issues. (See organizer portal for suggested questions).

#### 02. Local Questions

We encourage hosts to come up with 2-3 questions that touch on locally significant issues that relate to the environment. All questions should be written in a neutral way that doesn't favour any candidate or party.

#### 03. Audience Questions

We recommend having attendees submit their questions ahead of the event via email or using tools like Sli.do. Questions can then be gathered and vetted by members of your team and handed to the moderator to pose to the candidates. This allows organizers to sift out questions that are blatantly partisan, or avoid a flood of questions during the event which might make the debate dominated by a single issue.



## STEP 4 UNDERSTANDING THE TECH

Debates will likely occur online as we collectively figure out the new normal this fall.

We encourage organizers to use the digital meeting platform they are most comfortable with. Some examples are [Zoom](#), [Microsoft Teams](#), [Google Meet](#), or [Gather](#). Choose the right tool for you based on access, comfort with the platform and features needed for your debate.

Whether you are using the webinar style which requires [assigning host, cohost, panelist and attendee roles](#) or opting for the meeting style for your debate, it is important to ensure that everyone on your team is familiar with how to use the chosen platform and that your participants and audience will be able to access it easily.

- 01.** Make sure that you have easy to interpret instructions handy to provide to those who will be granted access to Zoom to help run the virtual debate.
- 02.** Make sure that your team is very clear on the date and time of the virtual debate.
- 03.** Ask all speakers to join you 20 - 30 minutes early to test their sound and lighting. Communicate the importance of being there early for the debate in case there are any technical issues, connection issues or participants that need extra help.
- 04.** Assign "day-of" roles.

### ACCESSIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 01.** Consider whether your audience might need closed captioning, French or English translation. You can use free plugins available online for closed captioning. Zoom allows for live translation if you have a bilingual team member comfortable with it or have access to a professional translator.
- 02.** Record your debate for those who are unable to attend and as a public accountability record.
- 03.** Pay attention to font size and other similar considerations to ensure that text is readable for audience members.

### Create and Manage Your Event Page

You can set up your event page using tools like [Eventbrite](#) or [Facebook](#) to help manage tickets and access to the debate. Do this as soon as possible after confirming candidates, setting your date and time. Send the link and details to the GreenPAC team and we will add your debate to the map and help promote it! You can communicate with registered attendees using Eventbrite or Facebook. Follow the instructions [here](#) to set up your page on Eventbrite so that attendees who have RSVP'd are reminded by email when the debate is upcoming and to tune in.

### Zoom Settings To Be Aware Of

We have focused our guidance on how to use Zoom because of its popularity. If you choose Zoom, you can get access to a Business Zoom account through community partners. Where this is not available, we can support organizers by covering the cost of upgrades. Free Zoom accounts have a few limitations including a 100-person participant limit, recording to your computer rather than the cloud, and a 40-minute meeting limit. Here are a few Zoom settings you need to know about. Most platforms have similar settings you can find easily but if you need our support as you navigate them, let us know.

1. Use a [webinar style](#) or [password protected Zoom meeting](#) to prevent trolls and Zoom bombers from disrupting your call.
2. Enable a [waiting room](#) so that participants can't join before you are ready.
3. Know how to [remove and manage participants](#) by:
  - [placing them on hold](#)
  - [disabling participant videos](#)
  - [muting them](#)
  - [turning off screen share](#)
  - [controlling and disabling chat](#)
4. Learn how to [use polling](#) to engage participants.
5. Learn how to [pin or spotlight](#) key speakers.
6. Learn how to [deal with disruptors](#) before and during a Zoom meeting.

## STEP 5 PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

Refer to the organizer portal for posters, flyers, social media material, newsletter, press release templates, and more ideas! Here are some promotion tools and tactics to utilize at this stage:

### 01. Engage the media and community organizations

As soon as the details of your debate are set, send out a media advisory to get it on their radar. Also notify organizations in your community that typically host election debates (e.g. Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce) to avoid scheduling debates on the same date. Where necessary, try to collaborate if need be. Use our media strategy resource to guide you through engaging the media.

### 02. Share with friends

Use email and your own social media to tell everyone about the debate. Ask your network to share with their network too (this step is critical; make sure volunteers are sharing with their networks as well). It can also be helpful to schedule meetings with contacts to discuss this or include it as an agenda item in meetings you are holding anyways.

#### #OrganizingTip

Event hashtags (#) and key players to tag (@) are in the **organizer portal**. We will also create a Facebook event for your local debate – here's how you find it.

1. Go to [facebook.com/pg/100Debates/events/](https://facebook.com/pg/100Debates/events/)
2. Click on your individual event page and then click "Message host".
3. In your message, let us know that you are the local organizer and we'll add you as a co-host for the Facebook event. This will let you update timing, location and other relevant details.

### 03. Get endorsements

Make a list of relevant organizations, businesses, Facebook groups and people with influence in your community. Ask if they'll endorse the debate by sharing on social media or by sending mass emails.

### 04. Reach out to your community

- **Postering/flyering** - plaster public places (ask permission if needed). Options include: coffee shops, libraries, community centres, schools and places of worship.
- **Activity Calendars** - Ask local newspapers and community organizations to add your debate to their calendar (e.g. unions, community centres and retirement homes).
- **Tabling** - Set up a table at university/college campuses, farmers markets, etc. Use a sign-up sheet for RSVPs, then add their data to your event page so you can remind them to attend later (see organizer portal for a template sign-up sheet).
- **Phone banking** - Organize a group of volunteers to call RSVPs 1 week before the debate (see organizer portal for guidance). Encourage all attendees to bring a guest (or two) with them.

### 05. Get endorsements

Think about other ways to spread the word e.g. is there a local coffee shop that would let you add stickers to their coffee cups or share the event on their social media?

## STEP 6 FINAL PREPARATION

**You're almost there! In the week just before the debate, figure out exactly how the debates will go, anticipate and address potential challenges. Do the following to make sure you are prepared.**

### 01. Check in with your team

Check in with anyone with an event day role to confirm all team members know their roles and what they are responsible for.

### 02. Check the internet connection

As much as possible, work to avoid the dreaded "Internet is unstable" message. We've all struggled with internet connectivity problems. Make sure to prep ahead of time and find a spot that has good reception and won't drop half-way through the debate.

### 03. Test your online platform

Test your online platform from the attendee, panelist, and organizing team perspectives. Make sure you test your platform to ensure a secure connection, clear video and audio as well as adjusting your light, sound and suitable backgrounds for all video participants.

### 04. Prep the candidates

Go over the debate format and the agenda for the event with the candidates (or campaign manager/communications director if the candidate is unavailable).

### 05. Set up the space

Anyone who will have their screen on and is one of the main speakers should find a spot that they do not mind showing to a large audience. Make sure it is well lit so that viewers can see you properly. Pro tip – find some books, or a stand to place your laptop on so that the camera is at eye-level – not only is this more flattering, but also makes you look confident. For best lighting, ensure any windows are in front of, not behind.

### 06. Engage the media

Send the media advisory, call or email journalists to ask if they will attend the event.

### 07. Promotion blitz

This is the last sprint! Send emails to supporters, boost the event on social media, organize a phone bank, re-poster, etc. (see the organizer portal for guidance on phone banking).

### 08. Prep materials

Prep materials such as slide decks, videos or other items that may be useful.

### 09. Do a test stream

Test streaming from Zoom to YouTube or Facebook if you have chosen to use this.

#### #OrganizingTip

**Live streaming the debate:** Facebook or YouTube are great options for live streaming debates so that more people are able to see it especially if you have high registration numbers and think your Zoom will reach capacity. Have your network use Facebook's sharing feature to post the live stream from your account to multiple Facebook pages. This can increase viewership and expand the reach of the conversation. You will also be able to expand your reach to other community members. To learn how to livestream from Zoom, check out these instructions.

## DAY OF THE DEBATE

Your team has done an amazing job preparing already but there are a few things to remember. A checklist for the day of will be available on the organizer portal.

### 01. Media

Send the media advisory again by 8 am.

### 02. Materials

Using Eventbrite or any other tool for communicating with attendees and your team, send over essential information such as the Zoom link, questions, agenda, and team tasks/roles. If you've used Eventbrite, you can confirm that this will be sent out automatically at a scheduled time when registered attendees will be reminded of the event.

### 03. Connect your team

Make sure the team stays connected using text, Slack, or any other platform. If necessary, hold a quick team meeting a few hours before the event to ensure everyone is clear on their specific tasks, including: who is providing technical support, who is running social media support, who is monitoring Zoom and reminding the audience to turn off their microphones, and who is acting as campaign/candidate liaisons to make sure candidates have all the materials such as questions and speaking notes before the virtual debate begins.

### 04. Consider a rehearsal

Depending on the time of your event and if it is helpful, you can do another dry run with the team, but try to minimize such on the day to avoid fatigue.

### 05. Meet with the candidates and moderator

Re-explain the virtual debate format and agenda for the debate. Make sure everyone is comfortable.

### 06. Run checks

Remind all speakers to join you 20 - 30 minutes early to test their sound and lighting. Once all checks are completed, you can ask speakers to turn their microphone off until you are set to begin. Send them a reminder shortly before you start, asking them to turn on their video.

### 07. Livestream

Set up the live stream and start recording early to ensure nothing is missed.

## AFTER THE DEBATE

**Congratulations on hosting a successful debate! There are just a few more items to tick off once your debate is over.**

### 01. Follow up with the media

Follow up with any reporters who attended or said they would attend. Take note of commitments made and send out a press release or media advisory with newsworthy statements (see template on the organizer portal).

### 02. Share the recorded video

Send the video of the debate to the GreenPAC team.

### 03. Share on social media

Share your success on social media. Post on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (sample posts available on the organizer portal).

### 04. Thank everyone!

Candidates, moderator, volunteers, partners and your team. Make sure to send the recording to everyone who attended and let everyone know about future events you might have planned

### 05. Gather feedback

Debrief with your team to learn what went well/didn't. A form will be provided by the GreenPAC 100 Debates' team shortly after the debate. When you send your post-event message (either using Eventbrite or any other method you prefer), you can also send out a survey to capture attendee feedback.

## THANK YOU!

**On behalf of the 100 Debates team, we warmly thank you for your efforts to make debates possible this election.**

Please reach out to the *100 Debates* team with questions or if you hit roadblocks along the way. You can also connect with other hosts through connect calls and Slack.

Be sure to check out the *100 Debates* organizer portal for additional resources. Content will be updated regularly and we will let you know about significant updates.

**Website** [www.100debates.ca](http://www.100debates.ca)

