**ORGANIZING AN ALL-CANDIDATES MEETING**

**What is an All-Candidates Meeting?**

Don't feel like organizing a debate? Keep an eye out for existing local events that will have audience questions to make sure your issues are heard!

An all-candidates meeting (also called an All-Candidates Debate) is used to gather candidates for office together to discuss a particular topic. They allow voters to have the opportunity to hear directly from candidates on issues that matter to them, and compare each candidate's answers and conduct when making voting decisions. These are particularly useful for getting answers on regional matters, as a lot of coverage for federal elections deals only with broad national level priorities.

**What should my all-candidates meeting be about?**

The tourism sector is as diverse as Canada itself, and all politics is local. While the discussion may extend to national policies, such as visas or the cost of flying, remember always to make it relevant to local examples. What struggles do you and similar businesses in your area face? Be careful to ensure that most of the issues discussed are federal. The federal government probably can't fix the potholes in the road outside of your store, but giving travellers access to your city or town with travel infrastructure, affordable transportation options, and support to market your area, is something your potential MP would be able to help.

**How do I set up an All-Candidates meeting?**

**Step 1 – Collaborate**

Find partners in your community – look for community groups and organizations, other businesses, and groups that care about tourism. The more people that are involved, the more difficult it will be for candidates to say no to your invitation.

**Step 2 – Organize**

Establish the basics – what are the time, date and place of your event? Will there be any cost to run the event? If so, who is going to front these costs?

Locate a moderator. They should be someone who is comfortable in front of a crowd, is organized, is non-partisan and is well known in your community/knows about the issues you want to bring up.

**Tips**

Try to pick a few different dates and see what works best for candidates – they will be swamped during the campaign! A Saturday afternoon or evening mid-week may be good options to consider.

There are many local places that an event could be held inexpensively or free. Check your local library branch, community centre, or public schools.

**Step 3 – Contact Candidates**

If there are not already signs out to let you know who your candidates are, look on the elections Canada page. Alternatively, you can try to look up candidates from the political party's websites. If you are still having difficulty, contact TIAC, and we will do our best to help direct you.

Tip – Notice is vital during the busy campaign period. Try to give a minimum of three weeks' notice for your event.

Call before you send a formal invitation and ask to speak to the campaign manager or scheduler as they will know the candidate's availability best. Follow up with the formal invite and details ASAP.

Let them know where they can find information about your business/issue so they can be prepared to give you well-informed answers.

If a candidate doesn't call back, refuses, or doesn't show up, do not feel bad about letting the audience or media know that they were invited but declined.

**Step 4 - Plan**

Decide length of each candidate's opening remarks, as well as Q&A’s

Example:

* Moderator introduces the candidate and the guidelines (5mins)
* Candidates give opening statements (3 minutes each)
* Moderator invites questions from the participants (30 minutes)
* Moderator ends the meeting

Draft some questions to ask at the debate (audience questions are great too, but you'll want to have some structure). Check out TIAC’s questions to our political parties for some examples.

**Step 5 – Publicize**

After your details are confirmed reach out to local media (newspaper, radio, television, community websites, etc.) and urge them to attend and cover your event.

Consider a press release or announcement in local media and social media pages and hashtags.

Send information to local businesses and community agencies and have your partners do the same.

Invite family and friends!

After the meeting, make details of the discussion widely available for those who were unable to make it.