AOPA'S GUIDE TO CANDIDATE FORUMS

AOPA AIRPORT SUPPORT
NETWORK

WHAT IS A CANDIDATE FORUM?

A candidate forum is an event hosted by a community or political group to engage political candidates in a discussion about issues important to its members before an upcoming election. A candidate forum is typically facilitated by a moderator. Forums typically include questions posted to candidates by some combination of the moderator, panelists, and members of the audience, or sometimes by all three.

WHY SHOULD PILOTS HOST A FORUM?

A candidate forum is a great opportunity for a local aviation community to draw public attention to important issues affecting the local airport. If done well, it can educate pilots about the candidates, and educate candidates about the importance of the local airport to the community. It can help build closer relationships with current and future elected officials who are important decision-makers on aviation issues. And finally, it can also bring the aviation community together and strengthen the community's ability to protect the airport.

WHAT OFFICES MAKE SENSE FOR A FORUM?

Depending on the number of offices up for election and the number of candidates, you may choose to have more than one forum. You are most likely to be effective in inviting candidates who are running for local offices and live in the community, as opposed to candidates for statewide or federal offices.

LOCAL CANDIDATES

Airports are usually owned and operated by a county or city government. Local officials, such as mayors, city council members, and county commissioners are key players in protecting, managing, and funding a community airport. Some communities also elect port or airport authority commissioners. They make important decisions on airport funding, land use planning, development issues, and management of the airport, and so have the biggest impact on aviation in your community. **Knowing where they stand on aviation issues should be a top priority for local pilots!**

STATE LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES

Candidate forums on aviation are also extremely important in state elections. State senators and representatives vote on the state aviation budget every year, which includes funding for airports and programs important to aviation safety. They also make important decisions on land use and zoning policies, legislate on state aviation, security issues, taxes on aviation, environmental rules, and many other issues and policies. Additionally, the Governor usually proposes a budget plan to the legislature, and is a key decision maker on many policies that affect aviation as well, and appoints many officials that oversee state aviation. Candidates for statewide office may not attend a local forum, but the will probably send a representative. **Pilots need to know how these important state policy makers feel about General Aviation.**

FEDERAL CANDIDATES

General Aviation continues to face critical challenges in the US Congress. Financing the FAA is still unresolved, User Fees are still a serious threat, and the allocation of funds to GA Airports is under

WHERE WILL IT BE HELD?

Find a good meeting space that is easy to find and use for candidates, the audience, and local media. The location of the forum should include a staging area that has room for a podium, and tables with chairs, one

ENCOURAGE CANDIDATES TO ATTEND

Your forum won't be a success if candidates don't attend. Take some simple early steps to encourage their participation:

> " Make sure you select a moderator who is comfortable as a public speaker, and known to the community.

attack. Additionally, Congress will continue to make many other important decisions that affect aviation, including the entire FAA program, aviation security and environmental issues to name a few. **Historically, Congress has been friendly to General Aviation— let's make sure it stays that way!**

HOW TO GET STARTED

First, make some basic decisions about your candidate forum.

WHO WILL HOST THE EVENT?

Candidates are most likely to participate in a forum hosted by a recognized community group. A good place to start for an aviation-themed forum is with an established airport support group, airport tenant association, EAA Chapter, or similar pilot group. An organization that has a reputation for advocating a particular partisan political viewpoint should not serve as the lead organization, as it is likely to scare off some candidates who might otherwise be good friends of the airport. If there is not an established aviation organization available, this might be a good time to start one. Otherwise, you can organize a temporary group for this purpose.

for the candidates and one for the panel (if a panel or questioners is used). The location should also be accessible for wheelchairs.

WHAT FORMAT WILL WE USE?

Do you want questions to come from a moderator or a panel? Make sure you select a moderator who is comfortable as a public speaker, and known to the community. The moderator of the forum will keep and call time on candidates' responses, will introduce candidates and members of the panel, announce and enforce the rules for the forum, and ensure that the forum runs smoothly. The moderator will also manage the public Question & Answer session of the forum (if any). If you use a panel, select two or three respected and recognized individuals representing the local aviation community and local media. These individuals should ask thoughtful questions on a variety of subjects including funding for the airport and aviation, the value of aviation for economic development, and local land use decisions around the airport.

1. **Check the calendar!** Be sure to check local calendars to make sure your forum doesn't conflict with another important election event for the candidate's availability on the forum date.

2. **Call them!** One of the forum organizers should call each of the candidates or their campaign managers to tell them about the forum and invite them to attend.

3. **Follow up!** Make sure you send them a written invitation with all the important details about your forum: date, time, place, format, and agenda.

4. **Help them prepare!** Unfortunately, not everyone is as knowledgeable about general aviation and local airport issues as we would like. Send articles, brochures, or a fact sheet with information about your airport and GA. Contact AOPA if you need help with what to send.

CHECKLIST

Follow this simple checklist! If you take it step by step, you can't miss.

- Select an organization to sponsor the forum.
- Designate an individual or committee to plan and run the event.
- Decide on a date for event (You may have to work a little to find a date free of conflicts when candidates can attend).
- Reserve forum location.
- Reserve a sound system for the forum.
- Invite people to serve as moderator and panelists – confirm their participation.
- Develop a comprehensive list of the aviation community to invite to the forum (pilot group members, airport tenants, airport related businesses, aircraft owners, individual pilots).
- Write a press release about the forum.
- Share information with AOPA – ask for additional guidance if necessary.
- Rally stakeholder (audience) participation in forum with phone calls, personal contacts, announcements at aviation and related organizations' meetings and events, etc.
- Create event invitation and other publicity materials (posters, etc.).
- Distribute forum agenda and format to all formal participants.
- Distribute press release to aviation organizations for newsletters and web publications.
- Draft event script for moderator and panelists.
- Hold pre-forum meeting with moderator and panelists to discuss script and questions.
- Request candidate, moderator, and panelist photos for publicity purposes – scan them for distribution with press releases.
- Distribute press release to electronic and print media.
- Mail invitations, map, parking instructions, etc to formal participants.
- Set a dry run with the moderator.
- Create sample audience questions.
- Organize refreshments for event.
- Create candidates' information packet.
- Make volunteer assignments (greeters, distributors, refreshment tables, etc.).
- Create information sheet on aviation in your community for all forum attendees and media.
- Create media packet for members of the media (include all information given to candidates as well as their photos etc.).
- Confirm sound system and location, refreshments, etc. (Be sure to do a sound check prior to the forum, just to make sure …).
- Distribute information packet to candidates, including possible questions and issues.
- Distribute press advisory.
- Re-release press release or release updated press release.
- Make follow up phone calls to all participants.
- Conduct pre-event publicity, electronic and print.
- Check location.
- Secure VIP parking for candidates.
- Follow up phone calls to all candidates or their staff.
- Follow up –
  - Thank you letters to candidates.
  - Press release with photo of event.