

QUICKFACTS ON THE DEBATE PLAYBOOK

Well-planned debates with skilled moderators give voters a perspective on the candidates and their positions that stump speeches, editorial board interviews, and political advertisements simply cannot.

– Dr. John C. Green, Director Emeritus, Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics

ABOUT THE OHIO DEBATE COMMISSION

The Ohio Debate Commission (ODC) started in 2018 as a collaboration of civic, media, and academic organizations that intended to put on better debates for better elections across Ohio. After successfully mounting U.S. Senate and Ohio gubernatorial debates in 2018, the ODC formed as a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan not-for-profit entity with a mission to foster fair and substantive debates that encourage participation in our democracy. Our vision is of a stronger Ohio, with well-informed voters and highly qualified public servants, candidates, and elected officials.

WHAT IS A DEBATE?

A debate is an incubator of democracy, and an opportunity for inquisitive voters to scrutinize and hold accountable candidates for political office as they respond to questions that focus on major issues. In the United States, political debates date back to 1858 when Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas competed for a U.S. Senate seat. Debate outcomes vary depending on who is making the assessment, but research has shown repeatedly that high quality debates can move voters' decisions. Many people confuse debates with forums because they both involve candidates for elected office answering questions.

DEBATE



- Includes at least two candidates for the same office
- Candidates appear concurrently, face-to-face and with opportunities to respond to each other
- Time has been provided for rebuttals

FORUM



- Candidates answer questions consecutively
- No planned opportunity for candidates to respond to each other
- Candidates do not ask each other direct questions

FEATURES OF A HIGH QUALITY DEBATE

Before the ODC came together, there was no authoritative organization in Ohio that set the standard for debates. We believe high quality debates are defined by:

- Civility between candidates, candidates and moderators, and audience members
- Interaction moderated by professionals selected through an unbiased process
- Development and use of well-considered questions
- Production quality that is maintained across all media platforms
- Preparation with candidates and separately with moderators to acclimate them to staging, timing, sound systems, and cameras

WHY CANDIDATE DEBATES ARE A GOOD IDEA

Election decisions affect Ohioans' daily lives and livelihoods, yet reliable, trustworthy information about candidates is more limited than ever due to political polarization. In addition, a polarized democracy alienates candidates, voters, moderators, and potential debate hosts. Your thoughtful approach will honor the roles of candidates and voters alike and help overcome concerns of politicalization. Your stepping up fills the void by setting a standard and encouraging more groups to hold debates.

HOW THE PLAYBOOK HELPS

The Playbook provides step-by-step guidelines, from identifying the contested races that might be worthy of putting on a debate, to post-debate thank yous and planning for the next cycle. We offer best practices from what we and other statewide debate collaborations have learned, and links to other useful guides. In the appendix, you will find more than a dozen sample documents for you to adapt to your debate. Most of all, we hope you find inspiration and comfort in the Playbook, as you look to provide a needed opportunity for candidate-voter interaction. The Playbook will give you the tools to decide whether to hold a debate, get organized for and plan the debate, conduct the debate, wrap up and do the necessary post-debate follow up.



YOU CAN COLLABORATE

Find other nonpartisan organizations to reach more voters across more platforms and share the work. Consider colleges, universities or other schools, community development corporations and other community organizations, libraries, media outlets which might be commercial or public television, print, government access, or online, religious organizations, voter education organizations, or young professionals organizations.

The more info, the better. Thanks!

- Quote from 2020 Survey Respondent

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE NOW

- Download the ODC Playbook
- Email us for more information and support
- Schedule a call with us
- Watch our previously recorded debates and Playbook webinars
- Sign up for ODC updates on events, webinars, and more
- Contact voter education organizations, or young professionals organizations, and others

