HOW TO WRITE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Crafting a question to ask a candidate, especially in a public forum like a town hall or another event, is both a science and an art. While there is a best practice for structuring a question for candidates and the elements it should include, there is an art to customizing a question to the specific candidate on the receiving end of it so that you, as an advocate, get the most out of the interaction. This how-to outlines the elements of a well-structured candidate question and includes tips to keep in mind when crafting so that advocates can write variations on questions using the talking points in this guide.

TIPS FOR CANDIDATE QUESTIONS

- Research the candidate's position on the issue by checking to see if it is on the candidate's website or Google if they've said anything public about it in the press. This information can change how you'll frame your question.

- Make sure what you're asking them to do matches the authority they'll have (i.e. don't ask a state-level candidate about a federal bill and vice versa)

- Be specific with the actual question. Even if your setup is really strong, asking, "Why don't you support paid leave" can allow candidates who are not aligned with you to let themselves off the hook publicly. They could respond, 'But I do support paid leave,' and even name a bill; when in fact, the paid leave bill they support would force you to pay for it by borrowing against your financial future.

- Identify what legislation organizations you trust support (like NCIT members). You can use this to make your question specific by asking the candidates their views on those particular policies.

STRUCTURE OF A CANDIDATE QUESTION

- **Identify who you are**
  - ▶ Ideally, you can identify as a voter in their race (or at least in their state).
    - ☐ Hi, I'm [first name]. I live in [city, county, state] and will vote in the upcoming elections.
  - ▶ If you are with an organization, communicate the power of your organization with concrete numbers: how many members, how many people you serve in your programs, and how many people you've registered to vote in the district.
    - ☐ I [am a volunteer with/work for] [X organization], and we have X members, Y of whom live in your district.

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- **Name the issue**
  - ▶ I am here because I care about [child care, maternal health, etc.].
  - ▶ If you have a personal connection to the issue, name that (i.e. my child is in a Head Start program).
  - ▶ 1–2 brief talking points on the importance of the issue (use the issue-specific talking points in this guide).

- **Ask the question**
  - ▶ Include localized information if you can (i.e., I work for X child care center in your district).
  - ▶ Be simple and clear
    - ◻ Do you support universal child care?
    - ◻ Do you support expanding paid family leave to cover all part-time employees?
  - ▶ Be specific so you can get a commitment
    - ◻ If elected, tell me what specific actions you would take to address the racial disparities in the maternal mortality crisis.

- **Capture the answer and follow up**
  - ▶ Take notes on the candidate's answer and provide that information to your organization to inform strategy and hold that candidate accountable should they win their race.
  - ▶ If the candidate's response opposes your issue, take note and share it with the communications staff of your organization to keep track of opposition talking points.

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