



ARTS CANDIDATE FORUM/EVENT Toolkit

Presented by Arts North Carolina



Why Host a Candidate Forum or Event?

- Inform your community about the economic, civic, and educational value of the arts.
- Educate candidates about the economic, civic, and educational value of the arts.
- Encourage policy decisions to aid the arts and culture community.
- Increase awareness of the current challenges facing the arts.
- Promote voter participation in your community.
- Grow recognition for your organization and its mission.
- Build relationships with elected officials and community leaders.
- Expose the community to candidates for office in a nonpartisan way.

What Can Arts Related Candidate Forums or Events Provide That the Candidates Want?

- Nonpartisan event where they can be given an unbiased opportunity to be heard.
- A large audience of voters to hear their message.
- Respected host non-profit organization(s) to provide the opportunity.
- Time to meet informally and directly with voters.
- Information in advance about your organization and the issues to be covered.



DO'S AND DON'TS (IMPORTANT RULES FOR NONPROFITS & CANDIDATE EVENTS)

DO

- 👍 Keep your event nonpartisan and unbiased.
- 👍 Invite all candidates in the race (Check the official listing of candidates from your state or county election board, and/or county political party offices).
- 👍 Make equal effort to encourage each candidate to attend.
- 👍 Treat all candidates equally in every way at all times.
- 👍 Limit the time each candidate can speak if hosting a Q&A or debate.
- 👍 Encourage attendees to vote on or before Election Day.
- 👍 Provide attendees with nonpartisan information about the election (voting locations, hours, absentee voting or mail-in voting, required materials like ID, ballot measures).

DON'T

- 👎 Endorse or oppose a candidate in any way whatsoever.
- 👎 Make a campaign contribution or expenditure for or against a candidate.
- 👎 Rank candidates on who is most favorable to your issues.
- 👎 Ask candidates to agree with specific positions of the sponsoring organization.
- 👎 Show favorability to a candidate in any way whatsoever.
- 👎 Tell attendees which candidate to support or which party to register under.
- 👎 Do anything for one candidate that you haven't done for all the candidates in the race.
- 👎 Bring up a candidate's past voting record when asking questions.
- 👎 Ask a candidate to make a promise to support a specific piece of legislation.

STEPS TO HOSTING A CANDIDATE FORUM OR EVENT

STEP 1

ABOUT 12 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- **Set a date, time, and place for the event.**
 - If hosting in-person, choose a central location that is ADA compliant and easily accessible to those with disabilities.
 - Check to see if other community and/or campaign events conflict with your choice of date and time.
- **Decide whether the event will be in-person, virtual, or hybrid.**
 - See "Candidate Event Formats" section below.
- **Decide on an event format.**
 - See "Candidate Event Formats" section below.

STEP 2

ABOUT 10 -12 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- **Reach out to other organizations to partner or co-sponsor.**
 - Ask for their input on questions to ask the candidates or information to present. This is an effective way to build consensus and prioritize local arts issues.
 - This can help divide the work of planning and increase turnout at the event.
 - Partners can be arts organizations, or other organization within the community.
 - Including additional issue areas (i.e. Art & Affordable Housing) to the event as part of a partnership with another organization may expand the reach of the event, but may also dilute the impact and shift focus from the arts content.
- **Invite the candidates and brief them on the event.**
 - Get the OFFICIAL list of candidates from the State or County Election Board
 - Emphasize that the event will be nonpartisan.
 - Follow up with candidates during the planning process to keep them informed.

STEP 3

ABOUT 8 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- **Create a communications plan.**
 - Consider which media sources and outlets (TV, radio, print, online) to contact in order to promote the event. You may create a press release for the event.
 - Reach out to other arts organizations to promote the event widely.
- **Create a plan for turnout.**
 - See "Marketing the Event" section below.
- **Select a moderator.**
 - Using a well-known community leader can help increase turnout.
 - Someone who is knowledgeable about the arts in your community is helpful.
- **Create a 5-to-10-minute presentation (live and/or video) to share at the event.**
 - See "What Information Should You Provide?" section below.
 - This will educate candidates and audience and provide context for the event.
- **Create the questions to ask if hosting a Q&A or debate (see examples on page 9)**
 - The first question should be a simple warm up, such as asking them to describe their involvement in the arts, or experience with local arts organizations.
 - Provide background information for each question that provides a pro-arts context, such as economic impact pact or participation data.
 - Avoid asking them to promise certain actions if elected (like arts funding), but rather ask them to speak to why they might (or might not) support those actions.
 - Ask one "cross-sector" question that addresses an issue that affects the arts as well as the broader community, (housing, child-care, transportation, etc.)
 - Use the input from your partners and ask them to review the questions as well.

STEP 4

ABOUT 4-6 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- Confirm candidates' and moderator's attendance.
- Recruit volunteers.
 - ▶ Volunteer tasks may include promoting the event, greeting participants and candidates, setting up and cleaning up, and informing audience about upcoming elections.
- Promote the event through your organization's platforms.
- Invite the press (TV, radio, print, online) and possibly send out a press release (see "Sample Press Release on page 14).

STEP 5

ABOUT 2 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- Determine set-up and day-of logistics.
- Create a timeline for the run of the event.
- Confirm volunteers' attendance and duties (set-up, run of event, clean-up).
- Select a timekeeper. (This is very important for Candidate Forums.)
- Continue to promote the event through all outlets and networks.
- Reissue the press release to the media.
- Send the candidates materials or video from the 5-to-10-minute presentation, as well as any questions (with background context you will ask at the event. See page 9.)

STEP 6

DAY OF THE EVENT

- Complete set-up of in-person or virtual event space.
- Have staff or volunteers greet the attendees.
- Be sure to share election/voting information with the attendees.
- Host the event.
- Share the 5-to-10-minute presentation (live and/or video).
- Be sure to stay on schedule. Candidates are very busy campaigning.
- Be sure the event stays non-partisan, unbiased, and engaging.
- Clean up after the event.

STEP 7

WITHIN 1 WEEK AFTER THE EVENT

- Send all participants thank-you messages.
 - ▶ Especially candidates, but also audience members, partner organizations, and volunteers.
 - ▶ Handwritten notes and letters are best, but emails can suffice.
- Post images and narrative on social media, websites, and blogs.

CANDIDATE FORUM & EVENT FORMATS

Online

- **Q&A (giving each candidate equal time to answer questions- see sample on page 9):**
 - Begin with an icebreaker question such as “What was the last local arts event you attended?”
 - Can include pre-approved audience questions or follow up questions if desired.
 - Provide background before the questions or reference the arts-focused presentation.
 - Utilize the input from the arts community and include a “cross-sector” question.
- **Debate:**
 - Works best with fewer candidates. Rules must be clearly established.
 - Provide questions before the event and get rules approved by all candidates.
 - Debates can allow candidates to engage each other.
 - Debates are more difficult to manage/moderate than timed Q&A.

Benefits of hosting online:

- No venue costs.
- No venue set-up/clean-up.
- No issues of parking or commuting.
- Easily accessible to those living further away or with busy schedules.
- If the event is recorded and shared, it can reach even more people.

In-Person

- **Meet and Greet (allows candidates to meet with voters informally):**
 - Share stories about how the arts have personally impacted you and the challenges the industry is facing.
 - Should include an opportunity for candidates to introduce themselves.
 - Presentation about arts will provide context for conversations.
- **Q&A (giving each candidate equal time to answer questions- see sample on page 9):**
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Benefits of hosting in-person:

- Easier for candidates to meet individually with voters.
- Easier for attendees to mingle/network.
- Participants will likely be more engaged.
- Hosting in a gallery, museum, arts center, or theater may serve as a physical reminder of the importance of the arts.
- Less chance of technological difficulties.

The 1-2 Punch



One of the best ways for your event to have the most impact on candidates and the community is to host 2 events: one inviting all the candidates in a race before the primary (when a broader field of candidates is looking to stand out), and another with the remaining candidates before the general election.

The second event may engage candidates for other offices as well. For example: the first event can feature a broad field of primary candidates for county commission and then the second event can feature the narrowed field for county commission as well as

candidates for the state legislature from local districts. This is a great way to ensure candidates will have a comprehensive knowledge of the local creative economy so they will be more likely to support the arts once elected to office. This method also builds name recognition for your organization and develops stronger relationships with elected officials.

Combining Online & In-Person

- Broadcasting or recording all or part of a candidate event and sharing it (whether you're posting it on your website, sending it to your email list, or sharing it in on social media) allows it to reach more people that otherwise wouldn't be able to make it to an event in-person.
- This would work best for a Q&A or debate format.
- If you only post or distribute portions, be sure to do so equally, so as not to show favor. For example, show every candidates response to the same question, not highlights.

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD BE PROVIDED IN THE ARTS-FOCUSED PRESENTATION?

Many candidates will not have an extensive knowledge about their local arts community. Providing this information at the beginning of the event will help them to thoughtfully (and favorably) speak about arts issues. We strongly suggest creating a 5-to-10-minute presentation to share at the event including:

- The economic impact of the arts and creative economies in your community.
- The impact of the arts on members of your community.
- The challenges facing the arts (especially after the pandemic).
- Current public funding for the arts and how an increase would be utilized.
- Current or future legislation influencing the arts.
- Key programs and achievements of your organization.
- Ongoing arts projects and grant programs in your community.
- Highlight at least one fact or program for children's arts education.

MARKETING THE EVENT

- Engage your networks
 - Use your email list, website, and social media accounts to publicize the event.
 - Enlist other arts organizations to do the same.
- Utilize local media sources
 - Reach out to local blogs, newspapers, radio stations, and TV channels to promote your event.
 - Get your event date on published local calendars.
- Ask candidates to share their participation in the event publically.
- Reach out to your county political party chairs.
 - They can promote the event among the local political community.

SUCCESS STORY

Wilmington: *The 1-2 Punch*



- The Arts Council of Wilmington and New Hanover County hosted a live candidate forum with nearly all New Hanover County Commission candidates during the primary, then a separate online forum with the remaining County Commission candidates as well as candidates for NC House and NC Senate seats leading up to the general election.

- Arts Council Executive Director Rhonda Bellamy shared presentations about the impact and value of the arts sector and also moderated at each event.
- Candidates answered questions about arts engagement from a moderator and the audience.
- After the first event, commissioners increased the county's investment in the Arts Council from \$10,000 to \$45,000 (350% increase). This effort was led by incumbent candidates on the commission that had participated in the candidate forum.



Raleigh: *The Meet & Greet*



- A group of Raleigh arts organization leaders joined together in 2019 to plan a meet-and-greet event with candidates for mayor and city council.
- Over 50 community members and 9 candidates came for the event.

- Candidates had the opportunity to meet constituents and learn about the strong local arts community.
- Attendees had the opportunity to engage candidates in conversations about the importance of arts education and the creative economy.
- The event was held in a gallery space at an arts center during a downtown-wide "First-Friday" event which showcased the arts and their vital role in the local economy and community.



CANDIDATE EVENT ADDENDUM

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Created by



ASHEVILLE AREA
ARTS COUNCIL



Question 1: Icebreaker

Question:

Please introduce yourself, and tell us more about your personal background and experience in the arts?

Arts NC Note: This is an easy question that will allow the candidate to relate personally to the arts. A non-policy question also allows the candidate to feel more relaxed in the setting, as public speaking can make anyone nervous, even candidates.

Question 2: Affordable Housing (Cross-Sector)

Background:

By the end of 2021, creative industries in Buncombe County were still down over 2,200 jobs from 2019 pre-pandemic totals. The majority of these job losses are in the Arts and Entertainment industries under Leisure and Hospitality, with Historic Sites and Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers making up 56% of the losses. While there are positions available, finding talent is proving challenging due to the local cost of living, limited availability of affordable housing, and other complex factors. These challenges were highlighted in the Buncombe County Creative Sector Earnings report published by Asheville Area Arts Council in November 2021. Findings showed there is a growing gap between local living costs and creative wages. On average, earnings for creative occupations in Buncombe County are 14% lower than the state average and 22% lower than the national average. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living index is consistently among the highest or is the highest in the state— which is largely being driven by the cost of housing. The pandemic further aggravated the affordable housing problems in Buncombe County. In order to address the hiring shortage, creative solutions to affordable housing for local workers must be put in place.

Question:

What do you think Buncombe County Government should do to address affordable housing challenges for local creative workers and others?

Arts NC Note: The background provides the context of the number of jobs lost, low wages, and other issues experienced by the sector, as well as putting the scale of the creative sector into context. The question is phrased to focus on creative workers needs, but also acknowledges that others face similar challenges, so that the candidate can address the large affordable housing issue, and not just that of creative workers.

Question 3: Local Government Funding for Arts & Culture

Background:

Artists, arts organizations, and artistic activities in general play a valuable role in the development and long-term health and sustainability of our communities. Research shows that communities with a vibrant cultural scene are more desirable to live in, have greater economic stability, and attract a more diverse and educated workforce. Local government investment in the arts create jobs, attract investments, generate tax revenues, and stimulate local economies through tourism and consumer purchases.

According to a report published by the North Carolina Arts Council, local government support among tier 3 counties was \$.73 per capita on average in 2020. In this same report, Buncombe County ranked last among tier 3 counties for local government support to the local arts council at just \$.02 per capita. In 2022, Buncombe County Commissioners made major progress in this area by including \$129,788 in line-item funding for Arts & Culture in the 2022-23 budget as a block grant to the Asheville Area Arts Council for regranting. That is a \$.50 per capita investment in the arts and an important increase in local government support, especially considering the substantial impact the pandemic had on the arts sector. However, this is still below the statewide average for Tier 3 counties of \$.73 per capita.

Question:

Considering the significant impact that the arts have on local economic development and community well-being, what role do you think local government should play in supporting arts and culture in Buncombe County?

Arts NC Note: The background statement makes a case for the valuable role of the sector and provides the relative history and acknowledges actions taken by current office holders. It also provides context for other communities and leads the candidates toward the idea that more funding should be allocated without stating that position directly. The question provides a clear opportunity for the candidates to support increased funding without directly asking if they support a specific position. It is best to provide information that support your organization position or interests, but to ask the question in a way that is less direct in order to allow the candidate the ability to craft their own response or position.

Question 4: Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan & Cultural Plan

Background:

As defined by Americans for the Arts, "public art is simply art in public space." Public art can take a wide range of forms, sizes, and scales— it can be murals, sculpture, memorials, integrated architectural or landscape architectural work, community art, digital new media, and even performances and festivals. And, if done right, it allows for more genuine public engagement — particularly in low-income neighborhoods, communities of color and among immigrant populations.

Though this is a powerful engagement tool, the County does not have a public art program, and though the city has a public art program, the public art master plan is 20 years old. The Asheville Area Arts Council and Asheville Greenworks are currently co-leading the creation of a natural and cultural asset inventory for Buncombe County in partnership with Thrive Asheville, which is slated to be completed in late spring 2023.

This is an important first step to creating a more comprehensive cultural plan for Buncombe County that would help us better understand what assets we currently have, how and why they should be maintained, what assets are no longer relevant, and what assets we are missing.

At the same time, the County is currently in the process of creating a Buncombe County Comprehensive plan to determine the relationships between land uses, infrastructure, and key community services and amenities for the next 20 years.

Question:

How do you think cultural infrastructure should be addressed in the Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan? Do you think creating a county-wide cultural plan would help ensure better equity, maintenance, and dispersal of these assets to foster more inclusive access for all county residents?

Arts NC Note:

The background not only provides context for the question, but also highlights the work of the event presenter, Asheville Area Arts Council, as a leading partner in creating policy. This will educate the candidates to the work currently underway, the public policy partners they can work with if elected, as well as providing context to answer the question. There are two questions, leading the candidates to two different but closely related positions, and allowing them the opportunity to support, criticize, or promote expansion of current efforts.

Question 5: Community Investment through the Occupancy Tax

Background:

The State General Assembly has given Buncombe County Commissioners the authority to levy an Occupancy Tax of 6% percent on gross receipts derived from the rental of any room, lodging or accommodation furnished by a hotel, motel, inn or similar place within the County. The County then disburses this collected tax revenue to the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, which spends the funding according to state mandated legislation. In July, the NC General Assembly and Governor Cooper approved modifications to this legislation that changed how this funding could be spent– the occupancy tax split went from three-quarters to be used for tourism promotion and one-quarter for community capital projects, to a split of two-thirds/one-third, increasing funding for community capital projects. The one-third for community investment must be used to increase tourism, further economic development, and benefit the community at large, and is limited to capital investments to municipalities and nonprofits.

Question:

How do you think these Occupancy Tax funds could be best utilized, particularly in terms of our cultural infrastructure?

Arts NC Note: The background provides the relative history, however, the case for arts investment is implied in the background provided for previous questions. The question is open ended, though given its position later in the event, it provides the opportunity for the candidate to propose use of this new revenue for the creative sector on their own, and not simply to support a stated position.

Move to Audience Questions when we have 10-15 mins left

If there is time, moderators will turn it back over to Katie to ask questions from the audience submitted through the Menti app.

Arts NC Note: Allowing space to answer question of voters directly. Open mics at events can be used, though it can be difficult to make sure the questions are appropriate before they are asked. Using apps such a Menti to engage audiences can be a very useful tool to achieve similar direct voter content while still maintaining control over which questions are asked and how they are phrased.

Additional Questions if there is time...

Question 6: Creative Manufacturing

Background:

Global supply chain disruptions have impacted many businesses across the U.S., and not all these impacts are necessarily bad. Disruptions in the supply line are causing more businesses to look to domestic manufacturing companies to fulfill their needs– leading to faster turnaround times, new jobs, and less negative environmental impacts. Manufacturing topped Buncombe County’s creative industry sales in 2019 and saw a 2% sales increase by 2021– among core creative industries these sales gains reached 41%. Musical instrument manufacturing; custom architectural woodwork and millwork manufacturing; and pottery, ceramics, and plumbing fixture manufacturing were among the top core creative manufacturing industries to see increases in sales and jobs.

A study entitled “Transitioning and Scaling Creative Sector Businesses: A Sector Development Plan for Creative Manufacturing in Western North Carolina” is currently being spearheaded by the Land of Sky Regional Council of Government to examine ways to scale creative manufacturing businesses. As part of this study, the Asheville Area Arts Council is working with Riverbird Research on an assessment of current creative manufacturing industries across the Asheville Metro in Western NC. Findings will be published in early 2023.

Question:

Do you feel that initiatives that build and strengthen creative industry infrastructure are in the best interest of Buncombe County and its residents?

Arts NC Note: It is a good idea to have a few questions to be asked if time permits. The background highlights the work of the event presenter, Asheville Area Arts Council, as a leading partner in creating policy. This will educate the candidates to the work currently underway, the public policy partners they can work with if elected, as well as providing context to answer the question. The question allows for a simple yes or no response, which could be good with limited time, though answers could also include more detail.

Question 7: State Museum in WNC

Background:

In 2003, Congress established Western NC as one of 49 national heritage areas. The rich culture of this area deserves to be preserved and shared through the establishment of a WNC History Museum. Though there are 17 state museums in the Eastern North Carolina, Western North Carolina only has one-- the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort. A funding bill may be introduced in the upcoming long session to support the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources in its efforts to finally create a Western North Carolina Museum of History and Culture for all the citizens of the region.

Question:

Do you feel that adding cultural resources in Buncombe County like a new state museum would be a good investment of state and local resources?

Arts NC Note: The background does provide context, though not as much because this specific project is less developed. The question can be answer briefly, but perhaps more importantly, it provides the information about this possible project to the candidates and audience. Often the information shared to the candidate and the audience in the question can be more important than the candidate's answer.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

[Media Contact]

[Your Organization] to Host Candidate Forum for the Arts The forum will feature candidates for [office]

[City, State] — [Your Organization], an arts organization that provides [short description of organization's work] will host a candidate forum with candidates for [office] to engage the local community about the value of the arts.

The event will take place on **[date] at [time] at [location]**, and will enable candidates and community members to learn more about issues facing the arts and how voters and elected officials can be involved in supporting the local creative economy. The event is free and open to the public.

After a presentation about the impact of the organization and the arts community, candidates will answer questions about the local arts community and will have the opportunity to meet with voters after the Q&A portion. Audience members will have the chance to submit questions for the candidates as well. The Q&A portion will be recorded and made available on the [your organization] Facebook page.

Early voting will take place from [date-date]. Election Day is [date]. Polling locations, dates, and times can be found on the NC State Board of Elections website.

ABOUT [YOUR ORGANIZATION]

[Your Organization] is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization located in [city, state] with the goal of [organization mission statement]. [Brief description of organization's activities].

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SOURCES & RESOURCES

- Advocacy & Communication Solutions: Guide to Hosting a Successful Candidate Forum for 501(c)(3)s https://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/wp-content/themes/acs/docs/resources/eadvocacy/ACS_candidate_forum.pdf
- League of Women Voters: Toolkit for Candidate Events <https://www.lwvnyonline.org/advocacy/vote/2021/Toolkit-for-Candidate-Events-final-031121.pdf>
- Nonprofit Vote: Hosting a Candidate Forum <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/hosting-candidate-forum-nonprofit-guide-1.pdf>