

CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT & TOWN HALLS ★★★★★

OVERVIEW OF CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT |

Elections are a fantastic opportunity to get decision-makers thinking about housing issues. Too often, affordable homes are ignored in the public debate leading up to elections. Raising housing on the national agenda will happen only when candidates for elected office understand that the issue of affordable housing is important to voters—and to do that, advocates must educate and engage.

Candidate engagement can take many forms: candidate forums, town hall meetings, candidate surveys, and candidate fact sheets. There are also opportunities to invite candidates to interact with residents or community members through meetings and site visits.

Asking candidates to fill out a questionnaire or inviting them to your agency can be a way to learn more about them while making them aware of your organization and the issues that are important to renters. You may also want to report the number of new voters your organization has been able to register and demonstrate the strength of your constituency. Candidates also learn what issues are key to voters by reading the letters to the editor page of the newspaper. Consider having clients write letters about issues that are important to them; letters can often be published as a response to a story in which candidates have discussed poverty issues.

When educating candidates, be sure to stay nonpartisan. To do this, remember:

I. NEVER CRITICIZE CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

- But you can add perspective or correct the record

II. DO NOT RANK OR RATE CANDIDATES

- Constitutes an endorsement

III. LEGISLATIVE SCORECARDS

- Only for incumbent legislators
- These are distinct from voter guides

IV. WHAT ABOUT NONPARTISAN CANDIDATE ELECTIONS?

- It's still not okay to endorse candidates or coordinate with campaigns