

Engagement Guidelines for National Science Policy Network – Science Debate Program for Regional Science & Technology Candidate Questionnaires

The National Science Policy Network (NSPN) and Science Debate are thrilled to be working with all participating teams in their efforts to engage state and federal candidates with regionally relevant questions on science, technology and health policies. As non-profit organizations, **it is critical that participating coalitions interested in affiliating with either of our organizations adhere to 501(C)(3) guidelines.** To accomplish this goal, participating coalitions should adhere to the following guidelines to maintain non-partisanship and remain unbiased towards the candidates. Additionally, we ask that at least one representative from your team join the monthly coalition zoom call to discuss strategic development, progress and implementation.

If your team is intending to indicate to third parties (candidates, newspapers, other non-profits etc) that you are working with NSPN or Science Debate, we will ask to review three items during your outreach efforts:

1. [Question set](#) (reviewed by Science Debate and NSPN)
2. [Coalition building and outreach plan](#) (to ensure non-partisan outreach)
3. [Invitation email and communication language](#) (to ensure non-partisan presentation)

1) Review of Question Set:

The questions shared with candidates, regardless of the level of office, must adhere to the guidelines below. If indicating that you are working with NSPN and Science Debate, **you must receive confirmation from us that your questions have been cleared.**

1. Questions to candidates should focus on science policy issues.
2. All questions must be non-partisan.
3. Questions should not refer to specific legislation.

Questions should call candidates' attention to science and technology issues and help draw out their views in a way that would not happen without your group's effort.

2) Coalition Building and Outreach Plan:

To better understand local issues and needs, teams should reach out to community groups and solicit public feedback and ideas for questions.

1. Outreach communications must be non-partisan.
2. Coalition partners should be non-partisan.

3) Invitation and Communication Language:

The engagement of non-profits with candidates is one of the more sensitive aspects of this project. To ensure that the language and approach does not favor one candidate over another, affiliated groups must ensure the following:

- 1) All candidates must receive the same question set.
- 2) Initial communications with campaigns should be similar and as neutral as possible.
- 3) Questions must be sent to candidates at the same time and have the same rigid deadline for receipt of answers.
- 4) Candidate responses must be equally shared and represented.

Groups CANNOT:

- 1) Create talking points for a candidate in preparation for the candidate's campaign appearances. Doing so could be considered an impermissible campaign contribution and demonstrate support for the candidate.
- 2) **Ask candidates to pledge to support a position on an issue if elected**, or to pledge to take specified actions during the campaign or when in office. To the IRS this would indicate the organization favors candidates who agree to make the pledge and opposes those who refuse. While you can encourage candidates to take a position on issues, 501(C)(3)s cannot highlight how the candidates respond or compare their positions.
- 3) Participate in any follow-up activities with select candidates.

501C3 Resources:

We are happy to answer any questions you might have, and have included some additional resources from [Bolder Advocacy](#) for detailed information about 501C3 rules.

- [Accountability Advocacy for 501C3](#)
- [Nonpartisan Candidate Education: How 501\(c\)\(3\)s Can Talk to Candidates During an Election Year](#)

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