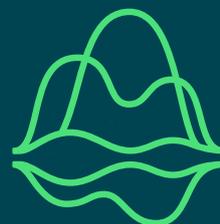


Developing Questions for Candidates at a Hustings



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Developing effective questions for candidates

Asking effective questions is an important part of a successful hustings, as it is a significant determinant of the candidates' answers!

Make sure you know what approach to questions your hustings is using - do you need to submit questions in advance, or will you be able to ask questions in person on the day?

Once you know this, you can use the tips below, which draw on Hope for the Future's advocacy approach. You can find more out about each element's approach by attending our regular online training, or accessing our other resources, available on our website.

1. Ground questions in research and lived experience

While you want to keep questions short and concise, it can be really useful to begin your question with a relevant statistic, context, or very short anecdote, that connects to the topic of your question.

This can help ground your question in an unarguable point, highlight its importance, and ensure candidates don't spend their answer disputing the relevance or accuracy of the issue, but rather answering your question about their thoughts, or policy answer.

The more personal, or local, this data or experience is, the more relevant and impactful it will be - of course, do not feel any pressure to mention lived experiences you are not comfortable sharing.

Examples

“Me and my family were recently walking along the local river, and saw the impacts sewage dumps are having in this constituency, with visible overflow in the water and banks. Recent community monitoring by Surfers against Sewage found our constituency has some of the worst rates of dumping by sewage companies in Wales...”

“Recent government data shows that 40% of households in our constituency are in fuel poverty, far above the national average of approximately 25%. I know firsthand how hard it can be to afford the cost of heating in the winter, and have seen family and friends struggling to find the money to pay these bills...”

2. Express why it matters, emphasising intersectionality and common ground.

Finding clear ways to connect your issue to widely held concerns, such as health, equality and justice, cost of living or community resilience, can often generate more constructive responses than abstract framings, or exclusively climate or nature.

Additionally, referencing expected or understood shared priorities between you, the community, and candidates alongside showing the issues intersectionality increases the likelihood that the issue will connect to a priority of each candidate, making an answer directly to the issue more likely, and making this answer likely to be more collaborative.

If you have time to research your candidates or parties stances on local or national issues, and can identify any connected themes between parties, this can be useful to mention

Examples

“Air pollution in this constituency is not just an environmental issue - it has a direct impact on people’s health, and makes our city centre less attractive, reducing footfall and local economic growth, which I know are a priority of all parties here today..”

The rise in local anti-social behaviour recently has partially been attributed to a reduction in free spaces for people to meet up, such as parks and other green spaces. I know all candidates have said they are keen to see greater community cohesion and resilience...”

3. Clarity and accountability

Ultimately, your goal should be to deliver a question which enables meaningful answers from all candidates. End your question with a clear ask about what the candidates think about the issue, a proposed solution, or what they would do if elected. You want to provide a chance for the candidate to express their thoughts, and make it easy for the chair to ensure they are answering your specific question.

Do consider if your question can be an opportunity to get the candidate to commit to a certain course of action, which may help following up with them if they are elected.

Examples

“How will your work as our MS, if elected, support active travel?”

“Given how important our schools are to our children's future, and the opportunity solar on school roofs has to reduce their costly energy bills, will you be supporting the local high school as they try to become a community energy hub?”

4. Framing

The most important thing is that your question is about an issue you care about, and provides candidates an opportunity to share their views on the matter.

If you are Chair, you may also want to have some more open, simple questions to ask candidates at the very beginning, to help the conversation start, or to answer in their opening or closing remarks.

Examples

“What do you think the most important issue in our constituency is?”

“What will you do as MS to tackle the climate and nature crisis?”

“Why do you believe your party, and you as a candidate, are best placed to represent this constituency?”

5. Things to avoid when developing questions

- The question should not reference a specific candidate or party, unless referencing the variety of views held by the panel.
- Try to avoid questions that sound accusatory. While you may be frustrated by the government, previous politician or candidate's approach, direct criticism or accusation of this can lead to candidates not of that party spending their answer time agreeing with criticism and condemning, rather than saying what they would do.

- Avoid overly technical questions, questions with multiple parts, or questions which require data recall, like “can you tell me how much the local government spent on flood defences last year”. Candidates are unlikely to know this, and while catching them out may feel satisfying, embarrassment from not knowing can lead to candidates becoming defensive, detrimentally affecting the quality of the answer, and subsequent answers.
- If you are organising this event, you may wish to share this answer advice with attendees in advance of the event, to help them feel confident, and ensure high-quality questions. If so, there is a separate version here for sharing.

If you have any specific questions about your hustings questions, you can contact Hope for the Future, look into our other available resources, or attend an upcoming online training!



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