

Independent  
Age  
**2 million  
many**



How to hold  
a hustings

# Contents

Introduction	<b>3</b>
Step 1 - Event logistics	<b>4</b>
Step 2 - Planning how your event will take place	<b>6</b>
Step 3 - The event and following up	<b>9</b>
Be part of our campaigner community	<b>11</b>

# Introduction



In the run up to an election, it's important that you and people in your local area have the opportunity to ask political candidates questions about the issues that matter to you.

One of the ways that you can do this is by attending or organising a hustings event. This is a public meeting where parliamentary candidates from different political parties come together to discuss their ideas and answer questions from the audience. It's a good way to get your priorities on their radar and secure commitments from candidates on important issues.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with clear instructions and guidance if you want to organise a hustings. In the run up to elections, there are extra rules that organisations and community groups have to follow and some of them can be tricky to interpret. We're here to help and hope this guide provides the information you need to confidently run a well-structured, informative and engaging hustings event for people in your community.

# Step 1

## Event logistics



Planning is key to a successful hustings event. Here's a step-by-step guide to planning your event, so that as many people in your community can hear from as many candidates as possible.

### Setting a time and date

- Once an election is called, decide on a date for your hustings as soon as possible. This will help to prevent clashes with other events in the community and allow you to invite candidates before their diaries fill up.
- Think about a suitable time for your event – many hustings take place in the afternoon or early evening, so that as many people can attend as possible. Try to avoid rush hour, as this may be more expensive, or difficult for people with long term conditions or disabilities, to travel during.
- Think about how long you want your event to last. You'll need time for people to arrive and settle in, then time for the actual hustings to take place. It's always good to build in a bit of extra time in case everyone is really engaged and the hustings runs over. It will also take people time to vacate the building.

## Choosing a venue



### Size of venue

Find a venue in your community that's big enough to accommodate the audience and candidates.



### Travel connections

Think about travel connections to your venue – picking a location that's near to train or bus links will make your event much more attractive.



### Accessibility

It's important your venue is accessible for people who might have a long term condition, disability or other needs. For example, ensuring your location is as step-free as possible, with wheelchair access and access to an audio loop will help to create an event anyone can attend.



### Facilities

Before you book, check your venue has seating, audio equipment and toilet facilities, so that everyone can enjoy a comfortable experience.



### Online participation

If you're running your event online, do some research into virtual platforms like Microsoft Teams or Zoom, to decide what best suits your needs. Consider that you might need some way for online attendees to submit questions, and how easily the platform can be accessed.

## Step 2

# Planning how your event will take place



Now you've decided where and when to have your hustings event, you need to consider how the event will run, and who will attend. Before you do this, consider the goals of your event.

### Choosing a format

Decide on the most suitable format based on your goals and audience.



#### Panel discussion

Candidates debate policies and answer questions from the audience.



#### Question time

Similar to the TV show, where questions are submitted and selected in advance, with responses and discussion from local candidates and community leaders.



#### Debate

With an independent chair, ask candidates to debate directly around their thoughts on specific topics.

## Inviting candidates

- It's very important you treat all major political parties equally. If you live in England be sure to invite, as a minimum, candidates from the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties. If you're based in Scotland you should invite the SNP candidate, if you live in Wales see if there is a member of Plaid Cymru running for election, and if you're in Northern Ireland representatives from the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin should be invited.
- Provide clear information about the event, date, and format.
- Include some information about your community group, organisation and campaign, and the people they aim to champion.

### Top tip

At Independent Age we have information about poverty in later life. If this is a topic you'd like to cover in your hustings, get in touch if you need local stats for your area or suggested questions to ask candidates at your event. You can reach us by emailing [campaigns@independentage.org](mailto:campaigns@independentage.org).

## Preparing questions

- Pre-draft some open questions for candidates to talk about their plans if elected.
  - **Examples:** What would you do to reduce poverty in later life? How would you help older people in poverty with rising household costs?
- Prepare some follow-up questions that help candidates to show their understanding of the issues, and what they would do to resolve them?
  - **Examples:** What would you do to increase the uptake of Pension Credit in our area? Private rents are rising rapidly in our area, how would you support older private renters?
- Be clear on how and when you want questions from the audience. This might be in advance of the session, or after the end of pre-prepared questions.
- You might want to ensure questions are ones that all candidates can answer rather than targeted a specific candidate.

## Promoting the event

- Sharing the event on social media, in local newsletters and in community groups can help you to spread the word.
- If you can, designing eye-catching posters or digital flyers can help people to take notice.
- Let your local paper know about the event and ask if they'll publicise it.
- Asking the candidates you've invited to share details about the event with their networks will help to make sure the event is well attended
- Work with other community groups or organisations to make sure that as many people as possible know about your event.

### Top tip

If you want a helping hand with how to you use social media, we have a short guide available.

Visit: [independentage.org/campaigning/CampaigningToolkit](https://independentage.org/campaigning/CampaigningToolkit) to find out more





# Step 3

## The event and following up



Now you've invited your candidates, decided the format of your hustings and told your community about it, you'll need to focus on the event running smoothly.

### Preparing on the day

- Work out where the fire exits are, and if there is a planned fire drill, and communicate this to attendees. If you're not chairing, ask the Chair to share this information too.

### Chairing the hustings

Whether it's you or someone else, the chair needs to ensure the hustings runs well. The chair should:

- **Introduce the candidates** at the beginning of the session. Be clear and impartially state to the audience if a candidate has not accepted your invitation, or if a candidate from a lesser-known party has not been invited. This will help you to demonstrate you are not promoting one political party over the other.
- **Give context** for what the hustings will focus on. Is it on a range of community issues or something more specific like poverty in later life or transport.

- **Explain the format** of the event and, if applicable, when the audience will be able to ask questions. This will help everyone to keep the session focused on the topics you've agreed to cover.
- **Have a clear sense** of timings, giving an opportunity for each candidate to respond to each question. There might be lots of points that the audience want to cover, so having strict timings will help the event to run smoothly.
- **Moderate questions** from the audience – if a question isn't appropriate, it's okay to ask an audience member to rephrase the question, so all candidates can answer, or to move the conversation back on track.

### Top tip

Arrive at the venue early, and familiarise yourself with the layout, the equipment, and the rules of the event. You should also greet the organisers, the chairperson, and the other candidates, and introduce yourself to the audience.

## After the event

- Thank the candidates for their participation, and provide follow-up contact details for the candidates to further engage with your group.
- Use the event to build support for the issues you have spoken about. Provide audience members with a way to stay in touch with your group, campaign or organisation.

## More about the law

- If you would like more information the Electoral Commission has more guidance about how to run a hustings in an election period. You can visit [electoralcommission.org.uk/are-you-holding-a-hustings](https://electoralcommission.org.uk/are-you-holding-a-hustings) to find out more.

## Attending a hustings

It may be that you aren't organising a hustings but would like to attend one. If that's the case, the above information should help you know what to expect. It's always good to think in advance about one key question you want to raise, and hopefully you'll get chosen to put your question to the panel during the session.

# Be part of our campaigner community



Independent Age is the national charity focused on improving the lives of people facing financial hardship in later life.

Our helpline and expert advisors offer free, practical support to older people without enough money to live on. Through our grants programme, we support hundreds of local organisations working directly with older people across the UK.

We use the knowledge and insight gained from our support services and partnerships to highlight the issues experienced by older people 'in poverty and campaign for change.

If you want to help us improve the systems that older people in poverty rely on, you can support our national campaign activity. Every action, big or small, can help us make an impact. Find out more and join our email network at [independentage.org/about-us/campaigning](https://independentage.org/about-us/campaigning).

## Stay in touch

We'd love to stay in touch and hear about how your hustings event went and whether you found this guide useful. Please do let us know by emailing [campaigns@independentage.org](mailto:campaigns@independentage.org).

## Need support?

If you, or someone you know, are aged 65 and over and need information on ways to boost your income and cut costs there is free information and advice on our website [independentage.org/get-advice](https://independentage.org/get-advice) or you can always contact our free helpline on **0800 319 6789**.



Independent Age      020 7605 4200  
18 Avonmore Road      charity@independentage.org  
London      independentage.org  
W14 8RR      Helpline 0800 319 6789



Like **Independent Age**



Follow **independentage**



Follow **@independentage**



Subscribe **IndependentAge**

© Independent Age 2024

Independent Age is the operating name of the Royal United Kingdom Beneficent Association.  
Registered charity number 210729 (England and Wales) SC047184 (Scotland).