

CALLING ALL CANDIDATES! HOW ENGINEERS CAN PLAY A ROLE IN ONTARIO'S UPCOMING ELECTIONS

By Howard Brown and Kaitlynn Dodge

THE YEAR 2014 is expected to be an exciting one when it comes to life on the campaign trail.

Many municipalities across the province have already entered campaign mode as they work toward Ontario municipal election day on October 27. Provincially, the date is less certain but it is widely expected there will be a spring or fall election.

For the more than 77,000 professional engineers across the province, the election will mean ample opportunity to build relationships, while putting engineering regulatory issues on the provincial agenda.

All-candidate debates are a common way for specific issues to be discussed among those seeking public office. They have also proven to be a good way for engineers to increase PEO's profile in the community and ensure that issues important to the practice of engineering are discussed.

Last summer, PEO worked with its GLP chairs to hold all-candidate debates in four of the five ridings that held byelections, including London-West, Windsor Tecumseh, Ottawa South, and Scarborough-Guildwood.

It was through these events that PEO compiled the following suggestions for chapters or Government Liaison Program chairs who might be interested in holding an all-candidate debate in the coming year. Provincially, these often have to be organized quickly due to the uncertainty of when an election will be called and the short campaign window before election day.

1. **Get in the door:** If you're trying to organize an all-candidate debate or similar event, the best way to get the ball rolling is to get in the door. Go to the campaign or constituency office and introduce yourself. Tell the staff what you are trying to achieve and who is behind the event. Remember that, often, the decision to attend will not be made by the candidate.
2. **Secure the incumbent first:** Confirming candidates can often be a case of the chicken or the egg. Everyone wants to know who else is participating. Focus on confirming the incumbent first. If they are participating, the likelihood that others will follow suit is higher.
3. **Captivate the crowd:** There is nothing worse than a room with empty chairs. Don't wait until you have a slate full of candidates to start inviting the community. It is common practice to create an invitation with the names of the candidates who have been invited. Just be

sure to note that they haven't confirmed yet by adding the word "invited" beside the names.

4. **Think of a theme:** Think of an overarching idea that can pull together the questions under a common umbrella. Consider tying the theme into engineering. Some suggestions are: "governing in the public interest" or "public safety in the community."
5. **Prepare questions and answers in advance:** Just as no one wants to attend an all-candidate debate in an empty room, people also don't want to wait awkwardly for the first question to be asked. Write two to three questions in advance for the candidates to answer and get the conversation going.
6. **Focus on food:** Refreshments are important to have—jugs of water, fruit, muffins, cookies, etc. Good food is often the thing that people remember most about an event.
7. **Use a neutral moderator:** It's important that those participating in the event and those who are spectators know the organizers are objective and hosting the event to create public debate, not to benefit one candidate over another. Consider asking a neutral media personality or a community leader, who has experience with crowds, to moderate.
8. **Use a good sound system:** What?! Make sure attendees can hear what's said in all corners of the room. Test the sound system at the venue in advance. Remember that sound is different in a room full of people.
9. **Have good sightlines:** Have you ever been the person sitting behind the pillar in the middle of the room? If so, you'll know it isn't fun. Set up the room so that there is no bad seat. Also, don't pack the room full of chairs. If you have to add more once people start arriving, that's better than having 30 people sitting in a room set up for 60.
10. **Have PEO-branded materials on hand:** Ask PEO head office to provide some handouts for attendees. This provides added value! It is also a good idea to have a PEO banner at the front of the room to remind attendees and participants who organized the event.

"Remember that PEO staff are here to help you organize your next event," says Jeannette Chau, P.Eng., manager, Government Liaison Program. "We have experience with events such as all-candidate meetings that make a big difference in raising the profile of PEO and making sure key engineering regulation issues are on the agenda." Σ

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