

On Thursday 6 May, elections will be held for the Scottish Parliament. The last Parliament has seen a significant increase in interest in the climate emergency, but this must be turned into urgent action to transition to a zero-carbon economy in the next Parliament. Election debates can be a great way to find out what your local candidates think on climate issues, and give local voters a chance to hear from the people bidding to be their MSP.

Why organise a debate?

There are lots of reasons to organise a climate debate. A few include:

- It's a chance to put your questions to local candidates in a public forum.
- It gives members of the public a chance to question their candidates
- There are lots of issues being discussed at the election. By framing your event as a climate debate, you make sure local candidates are getting questioned on the climate emergency
- You can get commitments from local candidates to back your campaigns, then follow this up if they're elected.

You could try organising a debate in collaboration with other local groups - to share the workload and show the strength of support for issues in your area.

Election rules

The Electoral Commission has some [helpful guidance](#) on organising hustings for campaign groups. One of the important bits of advice is to ensure your event is impartial, either by inviting a representative from every party/candidate standing in your region, or identifying a clear, impartial, rationale for who you do or don't invite - making this reason clear to attendees. A common rationale, for example, is to invite candidates from those parties elected to the Scottish Parliament at the last election.

Organising a hustings online

It's unlikely that events will be held in person before May's elections, so think about the most accessible platform to hold your hustings on. Zoom is a useful platform for doing this - or you might have a system you already use. Free Zoom accounts can hold meetings for up to 40 minutes, so you might want to look into a paid account. If you don't have access to a Zoom account it's worth asking in your networks. Friends of the Earth Scotland have access to a limited number of paid accounts that might be available depending on demand, so get in touch if this would help at activism@foe.scot

You can find out more about using zoom in our [zoom guide](#) here. Make sure to only share the zoom link as far as it needs to go, and don't post it on social media. You may want to create a registration form using Eventbrite or similar platform so people can sign up and be emailed the link.

Getting your panel

Candidates can be busy so it's worth contacting them as soon as possible. You should be able to search for your local area and the name of a party to find a contact address to reach the party - or if a candidate is active on social media you could contact them there.

Also think about a host. This should be someone who can remain politically impartial, and who is confident in managing candidates and keeping to time. A member of your group would work well because they know the issues, but equally if you know any well known local people or local celebrities they could be a useful draw, you'll just need to make sure they know the issues you care about.

Promoting your event

Think about how you can promote your event. Your own social media channels and local Facebook groups are great, free, options.

With local events word of mouth is powerful, so encourage people to spread the news through their networks, including their friends and family. You could consider a poster or flyer to put up in local shops or notice boards to reach beyond your network.

And let us know what you're planning - FoES will be promoting election events and we'd love to include yours!

On the day

Plan the format of your event in advance. We recommend aiming for 90 minutes, and definitely no more than 2 hours.

Think about whether you want to allow candidates to do a short speech at the start of the event, and if so - for how long? Make sure you warn candidates that they'll be expected to speak, and how long they'll be invited to speak for.

The main part of these events is often giving local people the chance to ask the questions that matter to them - so make sure you allow enough time for this. It's worth thinking about how you'll take questions - will they be submitted in writing in advance, in the Zoom chat box, or do you want to just pick questions from the audience on the night? It's worth thinking of some questions your group wants answered in advance and using this as a starting point.

Zoom offers the ability to record a meeting - consider whether you want to record the meeting, the video could be useful for those who can't make the event. If you do record it then make sure you give the panel and the audience enough notice of this, some audience members might want to switch off their video if it's being recorded

Think about how you'll report what happens at the event. Do you want to invite local press? Make sure you give candidates some warning if you do. Equally, you could live tweet the event or write your own report to share on social media or your groups website.

Friends of the Earth England, Wales, and Northern Ireland have also pulled together a [handy guide](#), including suggested the below structure that you could adapt:

- Welcome from the chairperson, including a brief introduction on Zoom guidelines (10 mins).
- Introductory remarks from candidates (15 mins). This can be useful for attendees who aren't familiar with candidates. You can frame this around an introductory

question, such as "what are you going to do about the climate emergency if elected?" to ensure they stay on topic.

- Questions from the chairperson to candidates (25 mins).
- Audience Q&A (20 mins). You may want to think through how you want to structure the Q&A. For example, you could ask attendees to submit questions at the beginning of the event via the chat function
- Closing remarks from candidates (10 mins).
- Chairperson closes hustings (5 mins).

Questions

Think about your questions in advance, maybe discuss some as a group to put forward in advance. FoES has also pulled together some questions based on our priorities that you can find here.

Enjoy!

Elections are an opportunity to push candidates to agree with your demands - but it's also a chance to get together and discuss an issue you care about, so have fun!