I. **Keep it nonpartisan:** This means inviting all the candidates for an elected position, and not just the Democrat and the Republican. Inviting only the major parties shows partisan preference to those two groups.

II. **Build a coalition:** You can generate a larger audience and guarantee more candidates accept your invitation by having more groups involved in hosting the event. Caution: one issue with having too many groups involved in hosting is you might not have enough time to focus specifically on housing.

III. **Bring the cameras:** Do your best to get commitments from media outlets to broadcast the event or cover it in their publications. Use live-streaming options such as Facebook or consider posting recordings to your website or your blog. Let the candidates know the media has been invited.

IV. **Follow-ups are essential:** Be sure to have a sign-in table where you can collect contact information of attendees. This table should also have voter registration forms for people who have not yet registered.

V. **Materials and fact sheets:** Provide information to attendees and candidates in advance so that the conversation starts from an informed perspective with the most recent data available about the housing shortage and homelessness in your community.

VI. **Curate the questions:** A fully open Q&A can often get off topic or even unruly. Ask attendees to write their questions on note cards as they arrive. Arrange for some of your volunteers to go through the cards to pick the ones that are most interesting, relevant, and timely.

VII. **Give the candidates time:** The candidates for office are making time available during their very busy campaign schedule. Be sure to offer them time at both the beginning and end of the forum to discuss their vision and campaign in their own terms.

VIII. **Make it easy to attend:** When organizing events where many attendees are likely to be low income, always consider barriers that can be addressed to get people in the room. Offer food or childcare services, which can often be coordinated through volunteers. If you have the capacity, organize carpools to the event to boost attendance.
SAMPLE CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE |

CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRES SERVE TWO PURPOSES:

I. Collect information about candidates' views for voters.

II. Inform candidates about the range of issues that are important to your organization.

Using open ended questions, a candidate questionnaire should ask questions on a range of important issues.

The questionnaire should go to all candidates and it should be publicly posted. Provide clear instructions to candidates including a word limit, a clear deadline, and instructions for how to submit. Give candidates a reasonable amount of time to respond and be sure to keep the survey brief to ensure a good response rate.

Develop a plan for how the answers will be shared, and indicate to candidates how you will distribute their answers. Do not modify candidate responses in any way.

Remind candidates ahead of the deadline to submit their responses--and let them know that "Did not respond" will be used if no response if received. It is completely acceptable to list "Did not respond" for their responses.

Offer the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire to all candidates. This is important to ensuring that your efforts are nonpartisan.

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Re: 2020 Affordable Housing Election Questionnaire

Dear [Name]:

Today, the affordable housing crisis continues to reach new heights. In our [city/county/state], [#] renters are cost-burdened and [#] people experience homelessness on the average night. Among those hardest-hit are low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, and people experiencing homelessness. These families must make desperate tradeoffs between keeping a roof over their heads and buying food or medicine. Recent reports show that nearly every community in our nation—in urban, rural, and suburban areas alike—is impacted.

As a nominee for [Elected Office], [Organization Name] invites you to complete the attached 2020 Election Questionnaire on key affordable housing issues. The purpose of this questionnaire is to educate and inform communities on each candidate’s stance on the housing issues directly impacting them. It is not meant to serve as an endorsement of/for any particular candidate and/or political party. All major nominees for [Elected Office]—regardless of party affiliation—have been invited to complete the questionnaire.

In recent polling, by NLIHC’s Opportunity Starts at Home campaign 76 percent of likely voters in the 2016 presidential election stated that they would be more likely to support candidates who made housing affordability a focus of their campaigns and a priority in government. Six in 10 likely voters called housing affordability a key issue for them in the upcoming elections. For many Americans, this issue is personal: almost half of the survey’s respondents who identified as likely voters stated that an inability to meet rent or mortgage payments had been a problem for themselves or others close to them in the past 12 months.

Please send your completed questionnaire to [Point of Contact] at [Email] by [Date]. Upon receipt, we will post your response on our websites at [website] and use social media to connect the public to your completed questionnaire.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
2018 ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE
[Questions for ALL candidates; include local data where available]

1. The Availability of Affordable Housing
More than a third of all U.S. families are cost-burdened, paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. Nearly 17 percent are severely cost-burdened and pay half their income on rent. In our [state/county/city], [#] renters are cost-burdened, and [#] pay more than half of their monthly income on rent. The lack of supply—especially for those with the lowest incomes—has only made this problem worse. **What would you do to encourage the production of more affordable homes for these families?**

2. Mobility and Discrimination
According to research from Raj Chetty, moving a poor child out of a high-poverty community to a more affluent community increases access to college, decreases their chances of becoming a single parent, and increases future earnings. Despite the benefits, many low-income families face barriers to moving to high-opportunity areas, including discrimination based on source of income and lack of access to housing assistance. **What actions would you take to encourage mobility and stop source of income discrimination?**

3. Revitalizing Distressed Communities
Many low-income neighborhoods often lack access to employment, good schools, thriving local businesses, healthy food, and healthcare. **How would you support public and private investments in housing development, preservation, and community development as part of a long-term strategy to revitalize distressed communities?**

4. Housing Intersections
Having an accessible, affordable place to call home is critical to improving education, health, and economic outcomes. **What housing-based strategy would you use to address the education, health, transportation, and economic needs of low-income families?**

5. Homelessness
On any given night, more than a half million people experienced homelessness—sleeping outside or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. A recent study of U.S. cities found that 25 percent of all requests for emergency shelter went unmet. **What will you do to end homelessness?**
6. Housing Challenges In Rural America

Although millions of rural families have trouble paying their rent or mortgage, rural housing issues are often overlooked. Moreover, resources used by rural communities have been cut significantly. **How would you prioritize the housing needs of our rural communities?**

[Questions for federal candidates only]

7. Housing as a Safety Net Program

Unlike other federal safety net programs like Social Security and Medicare, federal affordable housing assistance is not guaranteed, even if a family qualifies for the program. Today, just one in four households that are eligible get the assistance they need. **What specifically will you do to expand access to this assistance?**

8. Legislative and Regulatory Changes to Federal Housing Programs

Several proposals to change federally assisted housing programs have been introduced over the past sessions of Congress. **How, if at all, would you propose to change federally assisted housing programs that serve low-income households, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, Section 8 housing vouchers, and public housing?**

9. Preservation of Affordable Housing

The preservation of existing affordable housing—including public housing and developments receiving project-based rental assistance—is a critical and cost-effective component in addressing the housing crisis. However, chronic underfunding has led to a more than $30 billion backlog in deferred maintenance costs for public housing alone. Communities like [cities in the state] are in severe need of updates for public housing developments, as well as developments receiving project-based rental assistance. **What would be your plan to preserve this critical resource for the long-term?**