

Candidate Forum Policies & Procedures Manual

Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce



1. Purpose Statement

The Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce hosts candidate forums as a community service intended to educate voters and promote civic engagement.

The Chamber does not endorse, oppose, support, or contribute to any political candidate, political party, campaign committee, or ballot measure through its candidate forums.

All forums shall be conducted in a fair, impartial, respectful, and nonpartisan manner consistent with:

- Chamber bylaws
- Applicable federal and Arizona election laws
- IRS requirements for nonprofit organizations
- Chamber neutrality policies

The purpose of the forums is to provide voters with equal access to candidate information so community members may make informed decisions.

2. Nonpartisan Neutrality Policy

The Chamber, its staff, board members, moderators, volunteers, sponsors, and event partners shall remain neutral throughout all candidate forum activities.

The Chamber shall not:

- Publicly endorse or oppose candidates during forum activities
- Provide unequal access or advantages
- Ask biased or leading questions intended to favor or disfavor candidates
- Permit campaign advocacy by moderators or staff
- Alter recordings to favor or disadvantage candidates
- Allow unequal speaking opportunities

Forum materials, advertising, introductions, and moderator statements must include a neutrality disclaimer such as:

“The Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce does not endorse, support, or oppose candidates for public office. This forum is conducted solely for voter education and civic engagement purposes.”

3. Candidate Eligibility & Invitations

Eligible Candidates

The Chamber may invite:

- Candidates whose names will appear on the official ballot from Town Hall.
- Certified write-in candidates recognized by the applicable election authority from Town Hall.

The Chamber may determine reasonable participation thresholds consistent with applicable law.

Invitations

- All eligible candidates for the same office must receive equal invitations to the in-person forum.
- Invitations must be sent simultaneously whenever possible.
- Deadlines for acceptance shall be clearly stated.
- Failure to respond by the deadline may result in exclusion.

Empty Chair Policy

If an invited candidate declines or fails to appear for any circumstances:

- No surrogate, substitute, representative, or prerecorded message shall be permitted.
- Statements submitted in lieu of the candidate’s appearance will not be read.
- The moderator may or may not acknowledge the absence neutrally.
- Remaining candidates may continue.

No exceptions will be made.

Candidate Withdrawal

Candidates who withdraw from the race after accepting participation should notify the Chamber promptly in writing.

The Chamber reserves the right to determine whether the forum will proceed, be modified, or be canceled following candidate withdrawal.

Write-In Candidates

A write-in candidate may participate only if:

- The candidate is officially registered as a write-in candidate under Arizona law, AND
- The Chamber verifies candidacy through the appropriate election authority (Town Hall), AND
- The write-in candidate meets the same participation deadlines and rules as ballot candidates and is acknowledged by Town Hall.
- The Chamber may require compliance with all filing requirements and participation deadlines established by Arizona election authorities.”

This is per guidelines set in the Arizona Secretary of State Candidate Guide and the Nonprofit Nonpartisan Voter Engagement Guide.

4. Candidate Participation Agreement

When a candidate acknowledges their participation in the forum they understand they are agreeing to the following;

- Forum rules
- Conduct standards
- Timing procedures
- Recording policy
- Neutrality standards

Equal Treatment Standards

All candidates shall be subject to the same:

- Participation requirements
- Deadlines
- Time limits
- Speaking procedures
- Venue rules
- Question procedures
- Media access policies

No candidate shall receive preferential treatment or individualized accommodation except where required by law.

5. Moderator Policies

The moderator must be:

- Neutral and nonpartisan.
- Provide the same question to all the candidates.
- Knowledgeable in public meeting facilitation.
- Free from campaign involvement in the applicable race.
- Positioned at the front of the room in view of the candidates and audience.

Moderators shall:

- Enforce time limits equally.

- Maintain decorum.
- Prevent interruptions.
- Ask questions consistently.
- Avoid commentary or fact-checking during the event.
- Refrain from expressing personal opinions.

The moderator may remove disruptive individuals or pause proceedings if necessary.

6. Question Development Procedures

Approved Question Sources

Questions may come from:

- Stakeholder concerns at Town Council Meetings.
- Community online boards/groups.
- Audience submissions.
- Moderator-developed questions.
- Community stakeholder surveys.

Question Screening Committee

A neutral review committee should:

- Remove duplicate questions
- Eliminate defamatory or inappropriate questions
- Ensure questions are relevant to all candidates
- Avoid partisan framing

Questions shall not:

- Endorse candidates
- Contain personal attacks
- Include inflammatory language
- Require candidates to attack one another
- Be directed to a single or multiple candidates

Questions should focus on:

- Public policy
- Community issues
- Economic development

- Governance
- Infrastructure
- Public safety
- Business climate
- Regional priorities

The questions will not be provided to any of the candidates before they are asked at the forum.

7. Questions Submitted by the Audience

The Chamber welcomes and encourages the public to submit questions to the candidates. The process below.

- The role of the forum Committee is to spectrum of issues. It is especially important in a candidate forum for the purpose of ensuring a full, fair, and frank exchange of ideas of interest to the electorate called upon to make a choice among candidates for public office.
- Questions for the candidates may be submitted to the forum committee via paper. The attendees will be provided with question submission papers with guidelines to submit a question along with pens prior to the forum starting.
- The forum committee will review all questions before being forwarded to the Moderator to be asked of the candidates. Anyone in attendance can submit a question or multiple questions.
- The same question will be asked of all candidates in stated forum and questions will not be revealed until moderator presents them to the candidates at the event.
- Submit a separate questionnaire for each forum and question.
- All questions submitted will be reviewed by the forum committee for consideration and will have final determination of which question(s) will be asked at the event and their priority.
- Submitted questions will be reviewed to ensure select/formulate nonredundant questions.
- Questions selected must be suitable for posing to all candidates, i.e., an approved question cannot ask a particular candidate to explain some past action, or a question cannot be directed at a specific candidate.
- No "What If" questions will be allowed.
- All questions that contain any personal attacks, inflammatory language, or endorsements will be rejected.

Generally, no further questions from the audience are allowed at the event

8. Forum Format Standards (See sample moderator agenda)

Opening Statements

- Equal time for each candidate (2 minutes).
- Speaking order in alphabetical order.

Question Segments

- Equal response times. (2 minutes per question)
- Speaking order is randomly determined.
- Identical questions for all candidates.

Rebuttals

- Rebuttals will not be allowed.

Closing Statements

- Equal time (2 minutes).
- Speaking in reverse alphabetical order.

An official timekeeper designated by the Chamber shall administer all timing procedures. Candidates exceeding allotted time may be interrupted by the moderator to preserve fairness and schedule integrity. (See the Addendum regarding timing).

9. Audience Conduct Rules

Audience members shall:

- Remain respectful
- Refrain from disruptions
- Avoid cheering, booing, chanting, or demonstrations

The Chamber may remove individuals engaging in:

- Harassment
- Threats
- Repeated disruptions
- Attempts to interfere with forum operations

The moderator or Chamber representative may issue:

1. A verbal warning
2. Removal from the venue
3. Event suspension if disruptions continue

10. Campaign Materials & Signage

To maintain neutrality and professionalism:

Inside the forum venue:

- No campaign signs are allowed.
- No banners, flags, or amplified materials.
- No campaign demonstrations.
- No distribution beyond designated areas.

Candidates may:

- Bring business cards or limited campaign literature.
- Greeting attendees before and after the event.

The Chamber should designate:

- Campaign stage areas (seating and neutral stage positioning).
- Equal table space if provided.

Rules of the venue regarding signs outside the building or room shall be observed.

11. Recording & Media Policy

The Chamber may:

- Livestream forums.
- Record forums.
- Publish unedited recordings.

Recordings should:

- Remain complete and unedited except for technical corrections.
- Be posted equally and without commentary.
- Post complete, unedited recordings whenever feasible.
- Avoid selective clipping.
- Avoid highlight reels focused on individual candidates.

Media organizations may attend subject to venue rules.

No campaign may falsely imply Chamber endorsement using forum footage.

Unauthorized Use of Chamber Forum Content

Forum recordings, Chamber branding, logos, moderator likenesses, or event footage may not be manipulated, selectively edited, synthetically altered, or redistributed in a manner that falsely implies Chamber endorsement, bias, or candidate support.

12. Outside Influence & Interference

The Chamber reserves sole authority over:

- Event operations
- Question selection
- Moderation
- Venue policies
- Timing and procedures

Outside organizations, activist groups, PACs, campaigns, town council, town staff, or political organizations, and candidates, shall not:

- Control forum content
- Dictate questions
- Influence moderator conduct
- Threaten operational decisions
- Demand preferential treatment

All complaints shall be submitted in writing and reviewed under established procedures.

13. Forum Integrity & Operational Independence Clause

The Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce is committed to conducting candidate forums in a fair, professional, safe, and nonpartisan manner for the benefit of the community.

To preserve the integrity of the forum process, the Chamber retains sole and exclusive authority over:

- Forum operations and administration
- Event format and scheduling
- Venue selection and logistics
- Moderator selection
- Question collection and screening procedures
- Audience conduct enforcement
- Candidate participation requirements
- Media access and recording procedures
- Security and safety protocols

No outside organization, political action committee, advocacy group, campaign, activist organization, community organization, donor, sponsor, member, or individual shall exert undue influence over forum administration or decision-making.

The Chamber shall not alter established procedures, grant preferential treatment, or modify participation standards in response to:

- Political pressure
- Public campaigns
- Social media campaigns
- Threats or intimidation
- Coordinated activist efforts
- Candidate demands are inconsistent with established policy

All candidates and participants shall be subject to the same published rules, procedures, deadlines, and conduct standards.

The Chamber reserves the right to:

- Modify event logistics for safety or operational reasons
- Remove disruptive individuals
- Suspend or terminate a forum in the event of security concerns or repeated disruptions
- Consult legal counsel regarding election law compliance and organizational risk management

Any formal concerns regarding forum administration must be submitted in writing through the Chamber's established complaint review procedures.

The Chamber's decisions regarding forum operations, when made in good faith and consistent with adopted policy, shall be considered final.

- Board adoption via formal resolution
- Annual review/update procedure

Procedural Irregularities

- Minor procedural deviations, inadvertent errors, technical difficulties, or timing discrepancies that occur despite good faith efforts to administer the forum fairly shall not invalidate the forum or constitute evidence of bias, endorsement, or unequal treatment.

14. Forum Cancellation Clause

The Chamber reserves the right to postpone, relocate, suspend, convert to virtual format, or cancel a forum due to:

- Security concerns
- Venue emergencies
- Public safety risks
- Natural disasters
- Technical failures
- Candidate withdrawal resulting in lack of viable participation

Such decisions shall be made at the Chamber's sole discretion.

15. Candidate Conduct Expectations

Candidates shall:

- Treat opponents respectfully
- Follow moderator instructions
- Adhere to time limits
- Avoid personal attacks or threats

Repeated violations may result in warnings or removal at the moderator's discretion.

Candidates may bring notes to the table and take notes during the forum. Props, including but not limited to charts, diagrams or other displays, are not permitted.

There will be no questions by a candidate to another candidate.

16. Complaint & Challenge Procedures

All complaints regarding:

- Bias
- Procedure
- Candidate inclusion
- Question fairness
- Conduct
- Neutrality

must:

- Be submitted in writing
- Identify the specific alleged violation
- Be reviewed by designated Chamber leadership

The Chamber may issue written determinations when appropriate.

The Chamber will make reasonable efforts to comply with applicable accessibility laws and accommodate individuals with disabilities when advance notice is provided within established deadlines.

17. Social Media Neutrality Standards

Recommended baseline:

- Chamber-owned platforms remain neutral
- Equal promotional treatment for all candidates
- No commentary favoring candidate positions
- No selective editing of forum clips
- No reactive political engagement online

18. Legal & IRS Compliance Statement

The Chamber shall conduct forums consistent with:

- Arizona election laws
- IRS regulations governing nonprofit organizations
- Chamber Bylaws and governance policies

Nothing in a forum shall constitute:

- Political endorsement
- Campaign contribution
- Coordinated campaign activity

The Chamber may update or modify this manual per any regulatory (federal, state, or local), or Chamber bylaw changes at any time.

19. Board & Staff Recusal Provision

Any Chamber leader actively participating in a campaign for a candidate appearing in a Chamber-hosted forum should recuse themselves from forum planning, moderation selection, question review, and procedural decisions related to that race.

20. Crisis Communications & Public Statements

Only authorized Chamber representatives may issue official public statements regarding candidate forums, forum disputes, procedural decisions, or complaints.

Board members, moderators, volunteers, sponsors, and staff are encouraged to avoid public commentary that could reasonably be interpreted as:

- Candidate Endorsement or opposition
- Official Chamber positions outside approved statements
- Commentary regarding candidate qualifications or campaign issues
- Public disputes regarding forum administration

The Chamber's official communications regarding candidate forums shall remain factual, procedural, and neutral in tone.

21. Good Faith Administration

All forum procedures and decisions shall be administered in good faith for the purpose of maintaining neutrality, fairness, safety, and operational consistency.

Disagreement with Chamber decisions shall not alone constitute evidence of bias, endorsement, or procedural misconduct.

ADDENDUMS

A: Sample Moderator Script

Welcome:

Sponsor introduces themselves

Sponsor does the Pledge of Allegiance

Sponsor introduces the **MC**

MC introduces Board Members in attendance

Thank the venue

Restrooms

Drinks

Overview:

Format of the questions:

- The first round will be their 2-minute introduction in alphabetical order.
- The next 2 questions will be provided by the Chamber and curated from what was heard at town council meetings and online postings. The candidates will be asked these questions in random order.
- The final question will be drawn from the questions that are submitted at the front desk and be presented to the candidates in random order.
- In the final round, the candidates will be asked in reverse alphabetical order to present their 2-minute closing statements.

Audience Questions: If you have a question, please complete the form at the front desk and then a committee will curate 1 of those questions that are Germane to the forum, and the questions will be asked to every candidate. Questions cannot be candidate-specific or "what if" speculation questions.

Timer: Every candidate will have up to 2 minutes to answer a question. The timer will show a green card to the candidate at the 1-minute 30-second mark, a yellow card at the 1-minute 45-second mark to wrap up, and a red card at the 2-minute mark stating their time is up and we will move on to the next candidate.

All the candidates have been fully briefed in advance on the format and the timing. Candidates may ask for the question to be repeated.

Recording Thank **NAME**

Let's all be respectful and courteous without any comments, remarks, or noises from the audience.

Please turn your cell phones to either airplane mode or silent to not disrupt the candidates or everyone in this room during the forum.

Disclaimer: Per its by-laws, the Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce does not endorse any local, state, or national candidates. This forum is being provided solely to allow the community to engage with the candidates in a more intimate setting.

Questions:

- 1) This round is for the candidates to introduce themselves and we will go in alphabetical order. They will each have 2 minutes.
- 2) **QUESTION 1** curated by the Chamber
- 3) **QUESTION 2** curated by the Chamber
- 4) **QUESTION 3** curated from the audience forms

5) This round is for the candidates to provide any closing statements, and we will ask them in reverse alphabetical order.

Thank you, candidates, for participating in the forum.

Everyone, please give all the candidates a round of applause.

We would like to thank the **VENUE** for providing the venue and they have done a wonderful job allowing us to provide the forum here.

We would like to thank **NAME** for videotaping the event. The Chamber will post the uncut and unedited copy of tonight's forum on the Chambers YouTube channel, on all the Chamber's social media channels and through our media channels.

Give big thanks to **BOARD NAMES**, our board members, for assisting us today and curating the audience's questions.

Thank you all for being here tonight and supporting your community.

Please remember to shop and buy locally. The Chamber has over 320 wonderful members in the Carefree Cave Creek area.

Please remove any trash around you and everyone drive safely and have a wonderful evening.

Thank you.

B: Candidate Invitation Template

Hello Candidates,

The Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce invites you to participate in the 20XX **TOWN NAME** Town Council Candidate Forum on **DAY, DATE**, at **VENUE, ADDRESS**.

This forum is hosted for informational purposes only. The Chamber does not endorse or oppose any candidate or political position. Our goal is to provide voters with equal access to candidate perspectives ahead of the upcoming election.

Event Overview:

- **TIME** – Arrival and event briefing (timing, microphones, format) (15 minutes before meet & greet).
- **TIME** – Meet & greet with attendees (shared tables provided) (30-minutes)
- **TIME** – Break and transition to forum seating (5 minutes)
- **TIME** – Forum begins
- **TIME** – Forum concludes

Forum Details:

- Questions will not be provided in advance.
- All candidates will be asked the same questions.
- Equal response time will be given to each candidate.
- The forum will be recorded and shared publicly via the Chamber's YouTube channel a few days after the forum.
- Be prepared to have an introduction and closing statement and be informed of the general topics of **YOUR TOWN**.

You may view the Chamber's Candidate Forum Guidelines to better prepare yourself for the forum. **XX**

You are welcome to speak with attendees after the forum (outside the **VENUE**). Bottled water will be provided; however, you may wish to bring your own sealed beverage.

We look forward to seeing you next **DAY, DATE, LOCATION**.

Signature line.

C: Timing cards and procedures

An official timekeeper designated by the Chamber shall administer all timing procedures. Candidates exceeding allotted time may be interrupted by the moderator to preserve fairness and schedule integrity.

The timer will be placed in the front row, so all the candidates have a visible line to the timer.

The timer will start the 2-minute timer when the candidate starts to answer the question.

A candidate may ask for the question to be repeated, and this will not affect their 2 minutes to answer the question.

The timing is as follows:

- At one (1) minute and thirty (30) seconds the timer will hold up a green card.
- At one (1) minute and forty-five (45) seconds the timer will hold up a yellow card.
- At two (2) minutes the timer will hold up a red card and notify the candidate their time has expired with a bell, or verbal command.

Should the candidate continue talking after two (2) minutes, the moderator will intervene and cut the candidate and move onto the next candidate.

All candidates will be shown the cards and ask any questions during their pre-event prep time to ensure they understand the timing and can view the cards and hear the expired prompt.

D: FAQ for Public Complaints

Why does the Chamber host candidate forums?

The Chamber hosts candidate forums as a nonpartisan public service intended to educate voters and promote civic engagement. The Chamber does not endorse or oppose candidates for public office.

How are candidates selected?

Candidates are invited according to the Chamber's published eligibility standards and applicable Arizona election requirements and the municipalities election requirements. The Chamber received the candidate's information based on the approval of the candidate to be contacted by the Chamber to participate in the forum.

Why are some questions not asked?

Questions are reviewed for:

- Relevance
- Neutrality
- Duplications
- Decorum
- Applicability to all candidates
- Time

Questions containing personal attacks, inflammatory language, or candidate-specific accusations may be excluded.

Why are candidates asked the same questions?

Equal questioning procedures help maintain fairness, consistency, and neutrality.

Why are rebuttals not allowed?

The Chamber may structure forums to maximize issue-based discussion, maintain civility, preserve time fairness, and reduce personal conflict between candidates.

Why can't audience members directly question candidates?

The Chamber uses moderated procedures to:

- Maintain order

- Ensure fairness
- Prevent disruptions
- Avoid unequal treatment of candidates

Why is audience participation limited?

Candidate forums are structured educational events and are not public hearings or open town hall meetings.

Audience participation may be limited, moderated, or restricted entirely to preserve:

- Fairness,
- Time management,
- Orderly proceedings,
- Candidate equality,
- And event safety.

The Chamber reserves the right to:

- Screen questions,
- Limit follow-up questions,
- Restrict live audience interaction,
- Or prohibit open-microphone participation.

Why are campaign signs restricted?

Campaign material restrictions help preserve a neutral and professional environment for all participants and attendees.

Can the Chamber remove disruptive attendees?

Yes. The Chamber reserves the right to remove individuals whose conduct disrupts the forum or interferes with event operations.

Does the Chamber fact-check candidates during the event?

No. The Chamber's role is to facilitate discussion fairly and neutrally, not to debate or evaluate candidate statements during the forum.

Can candidates receive questions in advance?

No. Questions are not shared with candidates before the event unless expressly stated in advance and provided equally to all participants.

Why does the Chamber not respond to social media criticism during forums?

The Chamber's focus is maintaining neutral, orderly, and policy-consistent forum administration. Official concerns should be submitted through established complaint procedures.

How can someone submit a formal complaint?

Formal complaints must:

- Be submitted in writing to marketing@carefreecavecreek.org
- Identify the specific policy concern
- Include relevant details or documentation

The Chamber may review and respond at its discretion consistent with adopted procedures.