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HOW TO CREATE A CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

The NAACP has a long history of being non-partisan yet highly political. As such, we can and should demand that our elected officials let us know of their positions on issues that are important to us.

In preparation for the 2004 federal elections in which people were asked to select from candidates for President, the House of Representatives, and in some cases the US Senate, the NAACP Washington Bureau prepared a federal candidate questionnaire and distributed it to our members. Attached is a guide to creating a candidate questionnaire for state and local elected officials, as well as a sample question from the federal candidates questionnaire for the 2004 Presidential election.

Should you have any questions about how to create your own questionnaire, or about the attached federal candidate questionnaire, please do not hesitate to contact the NAACP Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940. Specifically, you may ask for either Hilary Shelton the Bureau Director, or Carol Kaplan, the Congressional Analyst.

1. ESTABLISH YOUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

In conjunction with your NAACP branch or state president and political action chair, you should establish your legislative priorities, either state-wide or within your local municipality.

To do this, you should make sure you are familiar with the issues that are dealt with at the different levels. For example, Social Security is a federal program; therefore, asking Presidential or Congressional candidates what changes, if any, they intend to make to the Social Security program is appropriate; asking local mayoral candidates what changes they propose to make to Social Security is not. Many issues, however, (including such NAACP staples as public school reform, police accountability and eliminating predatory lending) transcend all levels of government. It is not only appropriate, but probably a good idea, to craft questions regarding these issues for your state and local candidates, assuming your branch or state conference has established policy on the issue.

You should also be certain to include any issues that are particular to your local municipality or state, again assuming that your branch or state conference has established policy. For example, if your local city council may, in the next year, consider a development that your branch has come out in favor of or opposed to, it would be a good idea to include a question about that development on your questionnaire. Similarly, if the state legislature is likely to have a bill before it in the next session (particularly one that was defeated or vetoed in the previous session) that your state conference supported or opposed, it would be a good idea to include a question about that legislation on your questionnaire.

In short, you will want to translate the unresolved legislative issues that your branch or state conference took an established, written position on into questions for the individuals who wish to represent you.

2. CREATE A DOCUMENT THAT IS EASY TO FOLLOW, LISTING YOUR BRANCH / STATE CONFERENCE POSITION ON THE ISSUES AND ASKING FOR A SPECIFIC ANSWER FROM THE CANDIDATES.

This document should be as clear as possible. In it, you will want to:

- (1) Present the established position of your state conference or local branch (this makes the document as much a learning tool for the candidates as it is an election tool for you);
- (2) Ask for the candidate's position, and leave as little room for ambiguity as possible. One such way to eliminate ambiguity is to say "do you support or oppose X?", and provide a space for the candidates to check, specifically, "support" or "oppose". You may then provide a space for them to elaborate, by either saying "please elaborate on your position", or "if elected, what specific actions would you take?"
 - If you provide candidates with an area to elaborate, you may ask them to keep it to a maximum number of words (i.e., in 50 words or less). This will enable you to compile results for the other branch/state conference members without having to edit the responses.
- (3) At the end of the document, ask the candidate to sign and date the questionnaire, so that there can be no doubt as to who said what, and when.

1. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The NAACP recognizes the important role equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action have played in strengthening the families, schools and businesses within our communities, has consistently opposed any attempts to weaken or eliminate current affirmative action laws and programs.

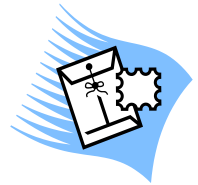
➤ Do you oppose or support any attempts to weaken or eliminate equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action in the areas of education, employment and contracting?
(check one) support oppose

➤ If elected, what specific actions will you take regarding equal opportunity programs?

DISTRIBUTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

There are several ways in which you can ask candidates questions that are important to your branch or state conference. These include:

- **Mailing** them to the candidates: you should be certain to send them to all candidates for an elected position, including third (or fourth) party candidates who are still in the running (you do not need to send them to people who have already dropped out of the race or who have declared themselves no longer candidates). If you mail the questionnaires, you should mail them to the candidates' campaign office and include a cover letter (preferable from the branch or state conference president or political action chair) asking that the questionnaire be returned by a date specific. You should also follow up (via phone) to make sure the candidate received the questionnaire, and that s/he is aware of the deadline.
- **Taking them to candidate forums:** If there is going to be an open debate, in which candidates entertain questions from the audience, you may want to have several of your branch / state conference members in attendance and prepared to ask a few key questions. Since you probably will not be able to address all of your issues in a forum such as this, you may want to establish ahead of time which questions are more important to your branch / state conference. Be sure to have the people asking the questions make it clear that they are representing the local NAACP branch / state conference, and make sure that they are as concise as possible, and that they ask as specific a question as possible, again eliminating room for ambiguity in the answers they receive.



If you do ask verbal questions at a candidates' forum, you should try to bring a tape recorder along so that you can transcribe the responses verbatim, so there is no need for paraphrasing on your part.

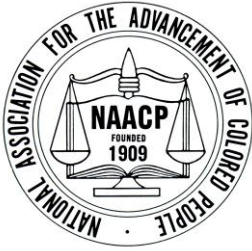
3. DISTRIBUTE THE RESPONSES YOU RECEIVE

Make sure to let your branch or state conference members know of the responses you received, regardless of how you obtained them. Be as true to the candidates' replies as possible (in other words, don't paraphrase or edit their comments whenever possible). You can do this through a branch or state conference mailing, by including it in a newsletter, or by making copies of the responses you received and distributing them at



NAACP events or meetings.

By distributing the candidates' stated positions while they were running for office to the maximum number of people, you will be in a better position to hold them accountable if and when they are elected. In the event that the candidate who is elected disagrees with the NAACP position, you will have alerted your members to be vigilant on a particular issue, which in turn may place you in a better position to enact a preemptive strike.



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Candidate's Name _____

CIVIL RIGHTS QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FEDERAL CANDIDATES

Fall, 2002

SECTION I: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

1. AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The NAACP, recognizing the important role equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action have played in strengthening the families, schools and businesses within our communities, has consistently opposed any attempts to weaken or eliminate current affirmative action laws and programs.

- Do you oppose or support any attempts to weaken or eliminate equal opportunity programs such as affirmative action in the areas of education, employment and contracting?

(check one) support oppose

- If elected, what specific actions will you take regarding equal opportunity programs?

SAMPLE