

FORMATS FOR PRE-ELECTION COVERAGE

DEBATES

Stage your own on-air debates preferably with listener phone-ins. This works well with ballot issues. It also works well with local races where candidates are eager for coverage – and when there aren't too many candidates running for one office.

Advantages: You ask questions about issues you think are important to your listeners. You can open up phone lines to listeners. You can be sure the debate is "radio friendly".

Disadvantages: Preparation time; it can sometimes be hard to get candidates into the studio, or a candidate may cancel at the last minute. It can be time-consuming to coordinate a joint appearance. This is awkward when there are several candidates in the race.

Record debates happening in the community and sponsored by groups like the League of Women Voters. Think about working with the group ahead of time to let organizers know what you'll be doing and work with the moderator to make it as radio friendly as possible, such as identifying each candidate before and after they speak.

Advantages: Someone else has done the legwork to bring candidates to the same place at the same time. Someone else has prepared to ask the key questions.

Disadvantages: The format or air quality may not be conducive to radio listening. You don't get to ask the questions you think may be of the most interest to your audience. You'll have to spend time editing the debate.

NEWS STORIES

News stories on the races. Talk to the candidates, or proponents of the ballot measures; cover the endorsements; spending; who's funding the candidates; cover controversies or issues in the race as they develop.

Advantages: If you have volunteer or newer reporters, you will have more editorial and quality control over what's produced than if a relatively inexperienced reporter hosts a live debate. If there's a race with several candidates, such as the first round of a vote for a city council seat, you don't have to interview each candidate as long as you report on them all. You will use less air time with a news report, than some of the other longer form pieces.

Disadvantage: It can take more time to produce a news story than to conduct an interview.

INTERVIEWS

Candidate interviews, either live or prerecorded, short or long.

Advantage: Is easier to arrange than a debate.

Disadvantage: Less lively than a debate. Takes good preparation. In a race with lots of candidates, it will be time-consuming to interview all of them and may not be of interest to your listeners.

A **"Ballot Rundown"** either with one of your own well-briefed, reporters or hosts, or another journalist, or political analyst, who can discuss the races and the ballot initiatives. With listener phone-ins. Someone from an alternative newspaper or a former elected official(s) is possible.

Advantage: You control the format and can deliver information to your listeners on many if not all the ballot issues at one time.

Disadvantage: Preparation time for your station reporter; difficulty finding an outside analyst who can be fair.