

# How To: Get Involved In The Election Toolkit.



**ELECT**HER

**#VOLUNTEER**

**#INFLUENCE**

**#ORGANISE**

# Introduction

[Elect Her](#) is a multi-partisan non-profit organisation working to motivate, support and equip women to pursue their political ambitions and stand for elected office in all spheres of Government across Britain and helping them to thrive once there.

We need more women's voices in every democratic space. This toolkit is for women who want to get active and involved in democracy and be part of shaping political priorities in the run up to an election, without being a candidate.

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## This Toolkit Covers How To:

- [Volunteer with a campaign](#)
- [Influence your candidates](#)
- [Organise a Hustings](#)



1.

**How Can  
I Help  
A Candidate?**

**#VOLUNTEER**

Volunteering on a political candidate's campaign is a great way to throw yourself into a hive of activity with others who are working to get your chosen candidate elected too, whilst learning more about the political process and standing for election.

All candidates want and need a team of volunteers to help them in their election campaigns. You do not need to be a member of a party to volunteer.

## **# To start volunteering:**

- Find out who your candidates are and work out who you would like to support
- Contact the candidate directly to ask how you can get involved and volunteer to help in their election campaign
- Contact the local branch/party/association and ask them how you can help

Let them know what skills you have and where you could potentially help them. If you are a social media whizz - then tell them! If you are great at policy responses - tell them!

**Politics and local campaigning is full of jargon or abbreviations. Do not be afraid to ask what they mean!**

## # Phone banking

Phone banking is contacting voters by phone on behalf of the candidate and asking them a series of questions, which indicate how they might vote in the upcoming election.

It is a great way to speak to your local neighbours and also find out what their most pressing concerns are.

The best thing about it is that you can do this from home!

## # Leafleting

Many candidates will have produced leaflets with their key campaign pledges. Leafleting literally just means taking the leaflets promoting the candidate and posting them through people's doors. Think of yourself as a political post-woman!

You will typically be given a list of addresses that the leaflets need to be delivered to. It's a great way to get in your 10,000 steps.

[Listen to one of the women in politics podcasts from our book club recommendations](#) to keep yourself entertained and play a really important part in our democracy.

## **# Canvassing**

Canvassing is asking people for support at election time, by going and knocking on their doors.

Canvassing is a face to face operation. Usually volunteers meet as a group and cover an area together, so it's a great way to meet other people too.

Good canvassing is done around the year. Unlike phone banking, you can try to convince people to vote for your chosen candidate by highlighting all the good things your candidate has done for the community and pointing out their pledges. Its a great way to develop political communication skills and hear directly from residents about what matters to them.

## **# On Election Day**

On election day volunteers knock on the doors of potential voters that they've identified through canvassing, and remind them to go and cast their vote. You can join your chosen candidate's team to do this.

## # Non-partisan volunteering

If you are not supporting a particular candidate, you can still volunteer to observe the election. Observing the election is an important part of ensuring accountability in our democratic process, and can include attending polling stations or the counting process and reporting back on what was seen. You can apply to be an observer through the [Electoral Commission](#), or [Democracy Volunteers UK](#).





# #Volunteer Checklist

- Have you researched which candidates are standing in your area?
- Is there an individual or party you would like to volunteer with?
- Which campaign volunteer opportunity appeals to you?
- Have you emailed your chosen candidate asking how you can get involved?
- Have you asked the candidate how you can be of most help on election day?
- Have you applied to be an election observer?

**2.**

**How Can  
I Influence  
Candidates on  
Matters That  
I Care About?**



**#INFLUENCE**

## # Meet your candidates

One of the most powerful things you can do is meeting with candidates to share the issues that matter to you. You can do this anytime from when a candidate is first announced. Once you know who is a candidate, contact them to arrange a meeting.

Prepare for the meeting by being clear about what you would like them to do if elected. To be persuasive, do your research! It is useful to find out their views and what they are interested in (for example through looking at their social media, and the party they are part of) to help you shape your pitch to them.

It can be useful to have a small group including people directly impacted by the topic you would like to talk to the candidate about. For example, if you would like a commitment for a zebra crossing outside of a school, ensure a parent who walks to school is at the meeting and ready to talk about how the issue impacts them.

Remember, this is about relationship building, so after the meeting do follow up with a thank you email, and again after the election, with commiserations, or congratulations - and get another meeting set up!

## # Gain commitments to act

Once a candidate is interested or empathises with an issue, the next question is how to turn this into a commitment to act. Asking candidates to make pledges is a tangible way for candidates to commit to a cause or campaign declaring their support and indicating that they are willing to take action. It can also be an effective way of holding them accountable if they are elected.

By making a public commitment to a particular cause, a candidate can also help to raise awareness about the issue and encourage others to get involved. This can be especially effective if the candidate is able to use their platform to draw attention to important issues that might otherwise be overlooked.

Think about what you would like your candidates to commit to. Look at what existing campaigns there are and ask your candidates to sign up to these, or create your own. If creating your own pledge, ensure you are asking the candidate to commit to something that they can actually do if elected. Their powers depend on what level of government they are elected to.

Finally, decide how you will encourage them to pledge their support, whether at a meeting, a hustings, via email or social media.

## **# Attend a hustings**

A hustings is a public meeting where local residents can ask questions of their candidates in the run up to an election. Hustings provide voters with a chance to get to know candidates better, hear what they have to say on local and national issues, and ask questions of them.

A hustings event is a chance to ask about issues that affect women in all our diversity. There are some policy areas that particularly affect women, such as personal safety, child care, and the gender pay gap.

In addition, policy areas benefit from being looked at through the lens of women's experience. For example, town planning can be improved by considering the different ways that women typically engage with the environment. Women have diverse and varied lived experiences, and so we can ask questions about these experiences which will often impact women differently from men.

# Top Tips

## For Attending A Hustings:

- **Research the candidates:** Look up their positions and, for those who have been in elected office before, their voting records on issues that are important to you.
- **Prepare your questions:** Come with a list of questions that you would like to ask. These should be specific and relevant, and take into account the focus of the event (if there is one).
- **Speak up:** When it's time for audience questions, speak up! Be polite but firm, and if a candidate gives an unsatisfactory answer, do follow up or challenge them.
- **Network:** Don't underestimate the power of networking at hustings events. Connect with others who share your concerns, and consider joining local advocacy groups.

# #Influence Checklist

- Have you contacted the candidate to set up a meeting?
- What is the concrete ask that you would like candidates to commit to?
- Have you researched the candidate and potential personal links to the topic?
- Have you prepared key points of what you will say?
- Will you use an existing pledge or create your own?
- Have you found out what hustings are on in your area and prepared questions to ask?

3.

**How Do I  
Organise  
A Hustings?**



**#ORGANISE**



Want to do more than just attend a hustings? Then get organising one! The benefit of this is if you are organising a hustings, you can set out a broad theme for the event to focus the discussion on the issues that matter most to your group.

## **# Tell us!**

We'd love to know if you are planning to host a hustings! Email us on [community@elect-her.org.uk](mailto:community@elect-her.org.uk)

## **# Get a team**

Who in your group is up for helping make the event happen? The initial organising can be done by one or two people but it's great to have a small team to help promote it and help out at the event itself. Co-organising the event with another group with related aims can help spread the workload, and increase the turnout on the day.

## # Set a date

Candidates are very busy in the run up to the election, so it's a good idea to organise the hustings with as much advance notice as possible. We recommend you start planning the event about 3 months in advance, and with a minimum 6 weeks notice to candidates and audience members.

## # Pick a venue

Decide whether you will host the hustings online or in person. If it is in person, ensure the venue is accessible and consider venue cost, room capacity, location, public transport, refreshments and audio visual equipment. You should have a sound system available for the meeting, including a hand-held microphone for taking questions from the audience.

If the event is online, choose which platform you would like to host it on, and while you are setting up the event, be sure to spend some time looking into the event settings. If the event is online, you can record it, as long as you get permission in advance from all the candidates, and notify all the attendees. Whichever event type you use, have a practice run, so you are confident in managing the room.

## # Invite candidates

To ensure political impartiality, you should invite all candidates in your area. You can find out who they are [here](#). Note that these may be announced over a period of time right through until the month before the election, so do keep checking back. In certain cases, it may be necessary to exclude some candidates, where you have impartial reasons for doing so. For more on this see [The Electoral Commission's Guidance](#) and [Good Practice Guide](#).

[You can use our email template](#) to initially contact candidates. In the election period candidates receive many invitations, so do follow up by email or phone if you don't receive a reply. If your group has specific policy interests or asks, include mention of these in the email and attach any key links/documents. This helps candidates prepare what they might want to say in advance on the topics you care about and can ensure a more productive discussion.

After your candidates have confirmed, you can send a quick email back to thank them. At least a week in advance of the event, send candidates a more detailed briefing to help them prepare for the hustings, [you can use our template briefing for candidates](#) to help you.

## # Plan the running order

We recommend that the hustings is 1-2 hours long depending on whether online or in person. There is no fixed way you have to run a hustings, as long as the public gets to hear from and ask questions. [Take a look at our template running order](#) to help you plan your event or make your own. The important thing is to maximise the amount of time available for questions and responses.

## # Get the word out!

**Invite your network:** Invite friends, family and your local networks and ask them to spread the word. If your group has a newsletter or contact list of other organisations, send out information via these.

**Bring a crowd who care:** Reach out to specific individuals (such as faith leaders) and organisations (such as the local community and voluntary sector network, trade unions, food banks and charities) and ask them to promote the event on your behalf and bring service users.

**Invite press:** Be sure to invite local press to attend. Candidates want local publicity, so are more likely to come to your event if they know that you will be inviting press along.

**Share on social media:** Create a social media image that includes the key details: time, date, location, and share using your network. Websites such as [Canva](#) provide free tools to make great looking images to promote your event on social media.

**Leaflets:** You may wish to make and print leaflets, and put them up in cafes, community centres, local notice boards or bus stops. Hand them out at busy locations, such as outside the school gates or train/underground stations.

## ● **Top tip:** **For organising your hustings:**

Add a line to your event promotion asking people to get in touch if they have access needs. Whether online or offline, plan for accessibility. Be sure to find out if there are things you can do to ensure your speakers and audience can fully participate.

## # Identify a chair

For the event, you will need someone to chair. The task of the chair is to manage the meeting, to ensure that everything runs smoothly and to time, to give each candidate the same opportunity to speak, and to ensure that the meeting is run in a respectful manner.

The chair should be someone who is seen as neutral by everyone taking part, and not a known supporter of any political party.

You could ask a local community or faith leader, or a local journalist. You should ask someone who has experience of chairing large meetings and can manage the panel - sometimes candidates can keep talking for a long time, or get into arguments with each other, so you need a chair who can remain in control throughout.

## # The role of the chair

It is important that candidates are given the same amount of time to talk, and no one candidate dominates the discussion. The chair should have a method for keeping time, and for letting candidates know when their speaking time is coming to a close, which should be explained to the candidates before

the start of the meeting. This could be a series of pre-written cards to pass along to candidates, or it could be someone sitting in the front row holding up a sign to indicate this. It is hard for candidates to judge for themselves how long they are speaking for, and so the chair should be ready to interrupt candidates to bring them to a close.

## **# Other roles**

Think about the roles you might want to have at the event in addition to the chair. You may want someone to take photos and someone to post on social media. If the event is in person, you might want someone on the door to welcome people (they should look up photos of the candidates so they can recognise them and introduce them to your group and the chair on arrival).

If the event is online, allocate someone to be the room administrator, allowing participants into the room, enabling closed captions, messaging anyone with technical issues, posting a link to your groups mailing list sign up page, and ensuring comments in the chat are kept friendly. Ideally, have a run through before the event, with all your team and the chair, to make sure that everyone knows what they are doing, and that all the technical aspects of the meeting are working.

Consider developing a simple code of conduct that you share with participants at the start of the hustings, in order to keep things respectful. If your group has a campaign or pledges you would like decision makers to commit to, think about where promoting this might fit into the running order, or if you will do it 1:1 off stage. Add notes like these to your event running order for your team.

## **# Questions for candidates**

At your hustings, hopefully many of the people who come will have questions to ask of the candidates. However, it can be helpful for your group to prepare a few questions in advance. These can be asked by the chair before you open the questions to all those at the meeting.

You could pick questions about particular local issues that affect your neighbourhood, or you could pick questions on policy areas that are important to you. In the run up to an election, campaign groups will often write their own manifestos with questions relevant to their campaign, and you can find these online.



## # Remaining impartial

Throughout the event, your team must remain politically neutral. This means that the chair should give each candidate an equal opportunity to speak. They can encourage people to vote on election day - but must refrain from making comments that encourage the audience to vote for a particular individual or party.

## # After the event

Immediately after the event, email to thank your candidates for speaking, and your audience for attending the event. Post pictures on social media with relevant hashtags. Include a link to your campaign, petition or manifesto if your group has one.

After the election, one of the candidates will be your representative. Ensure you invite them to meet with your group once elected to take forward the conversation, and hold them to account on the commitments they made.

# #Organise Checklist

- Do you have a team, a date, and a location?
- Have you invited candidates, local groups and the press?
- Have you shared a social media post and /or flyer to promote the event?
- Who will chair, and what other roles will you ask people to take on?
- Have you finalised the running order and shared a briefing with candidates?
- How will you ask candidates to pledge their commitment to act?
- Have you thanked candidates for attending?