



## What is a Community Forum?

A Community Forum provides an opportunity to bring together candidates, state elected officials and communities to share ideas about what matters most to them. This year, we can help make children's issues a top priority by focusing attention on state and local election issues and the impact they have on the children of Illinois. Children need advocates who raise their voices to let our elected leaders know it's best to invest in long-term solutions that prevent problems and meet diverse community needs. By organizing a Community Forum this fall, you will increase the strength and number of those voices and help us build better lives for future generations of Illinois children.

## What are the goals of a Community Forum?

A Community Forum serves to:

- **Educate** candidates and elected officials about the needs facing children and families in your communities and find out where candidates stand on those issues.
- **Raise the profile** of children's issues and emphasize that Illinois voters care about children and will hold their elected officials accountable.
- **Build relationships** with your current and future elected officials so that you are seen as a local expert and resource on children's issues.
- **Energize** those who attend to become more involved in future advocacy efforts on behalf of children and families.
- **Build broad support** for children's issues by linking with other people and organizations across Illinois.

## What does it take to have a successful Community Forum?

Through Voices for Illinois Children's experience working with legislators, candidates and communities, we have learned that elements of a successful Community Forum include:

1. A number of visible co-sponsors
2. A clear focus on children's issues
3. A room filled with community members
4. Candidates and current representatives who actively participate in the discussion
5. Participants who engage in the dialogue and ask questions

For more information, please contact Sheena Panoor at 312-516-5573 or [spanoor@voices4kids.org](mailto:spanoor@voices4kids.org).

*“When parents, educators, community advocates and policymakers join around a common cause, we can make a difference in the lives of children.”*

- Jerry Stermer, President  
Voices for Illinois Children



## Recommended Timeline

<p><b>Two Months Before</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reach out to groups that support children and family issues to co-sponsor the Community Forum. Make sure the co-sponsors understand that they are accountable for bringing out a specific number of community members.</li> <li>2. Invite the candidates by calling their local offices. Clarify that the event is a bipartisan discussion (not a speech or debate) about children’s issues with constituents. Offer several dates between Sept. 8 and Oct. 31. Avoid national, state and religious holidays.</li> <li>3. Choose a location that is convenient and accessible. Select a room that will make the size of your group look larger.</li> </ol>
<p><b>One Month Before</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Send a confirmation letter to the candidates to reconfirm the date, time and location.</li> <li>2. Invite community members. Spread the word in your community by using the sample flier.</li> <li>3. Choose a moderator. Suggested moderators include local newscasters, school superintendents and faith leaders.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Three Weeks Before</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Order Discussion Guides, Kids Count data or other desired information from Voices, or access the materials at <a href="http://voices4kids.org">voices4kids.org</a>.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Two Weeks Before</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reconfirm the date, time and location with the candidates by calling their offices.</li> <li>2. Contact your local League of Women Voters (if not already involved) or other group to provide voter registration.</li> </ol>
<p><b>One Week Before</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contact Voices if you would like help contacting the media.</li> <li>2. Print out copies of the sign-up sheet (available from Voices).</li> <li>3. Meet with all of the co-sponsors to go over logistics and the schedule for the day.</li> <li>4. Make sure you have:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One volunteer to take photos of the event</li> <li>• A note-taker to record the event</li> <li>• Enough microphones and any needed audio-visual equipment</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p><b>After the Forum</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Send thank you letters to the candidates, co-hosts, moderator and participants — their voice is important to developing a strong community of child advocates.</li> <li>2. Send completed sign-up sheets and photos to Voices and let us know how your forum went.</li> </ol>