

THE VPR VERMONT PBS DEBATES

VPR and Vermont PBS are collaborating on a series of 2020 debates for Governor, Lieutenant Governor and U.S. House to provide voters with a focused, comprehensive look at where the leading candidates stand on the issues. **Below are answers to some frequently asked questions about our debate policies and guidelines.**

How many debates will be held?

VPR and Vermont PBS are holding three debates prior to the General election.

- Thursday, September 24: Governor's race
- Tuesday, September 29: Lieutenant Governor's race
- Thursday, October 1: U.S. House race

Who's invited?

The goal is to provide voters with the best opportunity to draw clear distinctions among leading candidates so that voters are well informed by Election Day. Given the limited time allotted for each debate, it may not be practical to have all candidates participate in a debate. Therefore, VPR and Vermont PBS have established a set of objective criteria to determine each debate lineup. That criteria includes each the following:

- Major party status;
- Incumbent office-holder;
- Independent or minor party candidates who received 5 percent or more in a statewide scientific nonpartisan poll, conducted within the last six months; and
- Independent or minor party candidates who received 5 percent or more of the vote in the previous statewide general election for state or federal office.

What is a major party?

Major parties, as defined by the Vermont Secretary of State, must have received at least 5 percent of the vote in a statewide election and be organized in at least 30 towns and 7 counties. Currently, the major parties in Vermont are the Democratic Party, the Republican Party and the Progressive Party.

How does VPR cover independent and minor party candidates?

Debates are just one part of VPR's election coverage, and we are committed to covering all candidates on the ballot for statewide and federal office. VPR interviews all minor party and independent candidates for statewide office (if they agree to be interviewed) throughout the campaign season on *Morning Edition*, *Vermont Edition* or *All Things Considered*. Candidates also are covered through our daily news coverage and in our digital voter guide. You can find all of VPR's campaign coverage [here](#).

How does Vermont PBS cover independent and minor party candidates?

Vermont PBS will broadcast and make available on its website one-minute, filmed candidate commentaries of all candidates who wish to participate and who are on the Vermont Secretary of State's ballot for statewide office. All of Vermont PBS' election coverage is available [here](#).

Don't you have a responsibility to let all candidates have an equal voice in the debates?

Our civic responsibility is public service, and to ensure our audience has the information they need to make decisions when voting. A political debate is not a candidate forum; our overall coverage provides that forum throughout the campaign season. The purpose of the debates is to provide voters the chance to draw clear distinctions between viable candidates. Too many candidates in a debate (particularly on the radio) would be impractical and not serve our audience well.

How does your policy comply with the FCC's equal time rule?

The equal time rule does not apply to regularly scheduled news programs, such as *Vermont Edition*. In order to encourage broadcast stations to cover political campaigns, the FCC exempts a variety of news programming from its "equal opportunities" requirements.

How does your policy affect your nonprofit status?

The IRS allows a nonprofit to exclude candidates from debates when it's impractical or deters from the educational purpose for the nonprofit to invite every candidate, so long as the nonprofit uses objective selection criteria.