

## **Channel 17 Election Policies**

Revised 11/01. Revised 10/07. Revised 10/09. Revised 6/12. Revised 6/16. Revised 4/17.

**2.5.1.1 Impartial Forum.** It is the intention of Channel 17 to provide a fair, impartial forum for candidates and the discussion of election issues. Channel 17 will not endorse any candidate, issue or measure on a ballot. The Channel will use reasonable efforts to include all candidates in forums.

**2.5.1.2 Election Guidelines.** Election programming guidelines are established by the Channel 17 Board of Trustees and are updated on a regular basis. The election guidelines detail programming conventions related to the coverage of candidates and the discussion of ballot items during primary, general and municipal elections (“election season”).

**2.5.1.3 Election Guideline Implementation.** Channel 17 staff implements these guidelines under the direction of the Trustees. Complaints by users that arise from the implementation of these guidelines are to be addressed to the Chair of the Trustees. See also Grievance Procedure, Sec. 2.5.22.

**2.5.1.4 Publicize Guidelines.** During election season and upon request, staff will make election guidelines available, in written and cablecast form, to the candidates, members of the public and channel producers in a timely manner.

**2.5.1.5 Air Schedules.** All election forums will be posted to Channel 17's web site [www.ch17.tv](http://www.ch17.tv). Depending upon the availability of airtime on the channel itself, staff will make their best efforts to repeat election forums on Channel 17. Election programs may be aired between four and eight times during the course of election season. The specific air times may be scheduled at the staff's discretion.

**2.5.1.6 Additional Information.** For additional information about Channel 17 Election Guidelines contact the Channel Coordinator at 862-3966 x13.

**2.5.1.7 Conflict of Interest.** Six weeks prior to Election Day, Channel 17 Trustees who are candidates running for election or re-election will abstain from decisions relating to their specific political race. Decisions will be deferred to an alternate representative. If one does not exist, the governing board of their member community will appoint an alternate.

### **Definitions**

**2.5.2.0 Candidate.** A candidate is any person who has publicly declared that they will stand for local, state or national election. A candidate will have announced their intention to run for election primary, general, town meeting or special elections. A person will be considered by Channel 17 to be a candidate if their announcement appears in the "media of record" and/or they

file their intention to appear on the election ballot with appropriate government entity (e.g., local clerk's office, Secretary of State, federal election commission).

**2.5.2.2 Election Season.** Period of time in which election guidelines apply. Coincide with black out periods for provision of production services and airtime, described below. Channel 17's obligation to provide production services and channel airtime to candidates is subject to certain production and airtime restrictions. During these black out periods, candidates appearances are subject to Section 2.5.3.1, below.

**2.5.2.2.1 Production Black-Out Period.** Channel 17 staff is not obliged to provide production services to any candidate 30 days prior to primary, general, town meeting or special elections.

**2.5.2.2.2 Airtime Black-Out Period.** Channel 17 staff is not obliged to provide airtime on Channel 17 to any candidate 21 days prior to primary, general, town meeting or special elections. All election coverage will cease to be aired on Channel 17 twenty-four hours prior to the opening of the polling places on Election Day.

**2.5.2.2.3 Web Black-Out Period.** There is no web "black-out" period. Programs that are produced before the Production Blackout Period may appear on [www.ch17.tv](http://www.ch17.tv) through out the Airtime Black Out Period.

### **Appearances on Behalf of Candidates and Ballot Items**

**2.5.3.1 Candidate Appearances During Election Season.** During election season "black out period" candidates may appear on Channel 17:

- a) as a participant in a Channel 17 election forum to which all candidates have been invited;
- b) as a participant in a Channel 17 election forum sponsored by entities other than Channel 17;
- c) as an elected official carrying out their duties (e.g., incumbent mayor, select board member or member of an administration); and/or
- d) as a participant in a public event that is typically covered by Channel 17 staff or volunteers and not subject to airtime restrictions.

**2.5.3.1.1 Uncontested Candidate Appearances During Election Season.** Candidates who declare their intention to run in the General Election, but are uncontested in the Primary Election, may appear on Channel 17 during the Primary Election Season:

- a) as an elected official carrying out their duties (e.g., incumbent mayor, select board member or member of an administration); and/or
- b) as a participant in a public event that is typically covered by Channel 17 staff or volunteers and not subject to airtime restrictions.

- c) as a guest on a 15 minute interview hosted by Channel 17 staff or in a comparable program produced by a Vermont community access center.

**2.5.3.2 National Candidates.** Channel 17 staff and volunteers will cover appearances of national candidates when they appear in Chittenden County or within the state, if resources are available.

**2.5.3.3 Write-in Candidates.** Write-in candidates must make themselves known not less than 10 days before a Channel 17 produced or co-produced forum in order to be included as a participant in that forum.

**2.5.3.4 Ballot Item Advocates.** Advocates on behalf of a ballot items must make themselves known not less than 10 days before a Channel 17 produced or co-produced forum in order to be included as a participant in that forum.

## **Election Forums**

**2.5.4.1 Channel 17 Forums.** Top priority for the use of Channel 17 production resources is given to live election forums produced by Channel 17 staff, to which all candidates have been invited. These forums are typically scheduled in the month prior to Election Day and air live during Channel 17's regularly scheduled live program slot, are repeated on the air over the course of election season and posted on-line at [www.ch17.tv](http://www.ch17.tv)

**2.5.4.2 Co-Produced Forums.** To the extent that Channel 17 collaborates with Vermont media organizations or community based organizations to produce election forums, all candidates will be invited to attend.

**2.5.4.3 Prearranged Forums.** Channel 17 may choose to record prearranged forums organized by non-aligned organizations or sponsors (other than Channel 17), provided that all candidates have been invited to a Channel 17 forum or co-produced forum. Examples include League of Women Voters, local media outlets, neighborhood and professional associations.

**2.5.4.4 Notice of Election Forum.** Forums will be organized with as much lead time as possible, but a minimum of one week's notice shall be given to candidates.

**2.5.4.5 Moderators for the Forum.** Non-partisan moderators designated by Channel 17 staff will conduct Channel 17-produced election forums.

**2.5.4.6 Questions and Topics.** Questions for the forum may be drafted by Channel 17. Questions may be gleaned through review of local news, consultation with local officials and Channel 17 Trustees. Questions and topics will address issues of current public concern. Questions or topics may be sent to candidates for preview at least five days prior to the scheduled election forum. The moderator may also entertain questions from the viewing audience. Viewer calls take precedence over drafted questions.

**2.5.4.7 Format of the Forum.** The Channel 17 forum will be conducted so that each candidate is given equal opportunity to respond to the questions posed by the moderator and by the viewing audience. The moderator may permit candidates to ask follow up questions. The moderator will make their best effort for each candidate to respond to questions posed by viewing audience (via phone or in person).

**2.5.4.8 Absence from a Forum.** Channel 17 makes its best effort to schedule live election debates so that all candidates can attend. If a candidate is not able to attend, Channel 17 is not obliged to provide alternative airtime.

### **Other Election Programming**

**2.5.5.1 Budgets and Ballot Items.** Channel 17 staff will, to its best ability, make time available to member communities to present their budgets and Election Day ballot items to viewers. Community opponents or proponents of a budget or ballot item may request airtime to respond. Airtime will be scheduled based on availability and at staff discretion.

### **Restrictions on Use**

**2.5.6.1 Restrictions on Use.** If an individual appears on Channel 17 during election season, outside of a forum described above, they are discouraged from advertising or commenting on behalf of or opposing a particular political candidate.

**2.5.5.1 Pre-produced programs.** Pre-produced programs submitted on behalf of a candidate after the Airtime Black-out Period begins will not be accepted for cablecasting on Channel 17. This prohibition extends to citizens or producers who produce a regular program on Channel 17. The regularly scheduled program will resume at the close of Election Day.

**2.5.5.2 Penalties.** If an individual appears on Channel 17 during election season and advocates or opposes a candidate, their privilege will be revoked and they will not be permitted to appear on Channel 17 for 3 regularly scheduled programs or two months from the date of the transgression. (This excludes municipal coverage obligations if the candidate is an incumbent per Section 2.5.3.1, above).

**2.5.5.3 Discontinuing Prohibited Programming.** To the extent that Channel 17 becomes aware that a current producer has violated the guidelines, Channel 17 reserves the right to discontinue airing their regular program without notice. (See "Penalties" Section 2.5.21, above).

**2.5.5.4 Grievances.** If a candidate or sponsor of a ballot item believes that the Channel 17 guidelines have been violated, they will inform the Channel 17 Staff in writing. If they are not satisfied with Staff response, they may direct their complaint to the Chair of the Channel 17 Trustees. If the dispute falls outside of the guidelines detailed in this policy document, the Channel 17 Trustees may consider the matter at the Trustees' meeting scheduled to occur after election season is completed.

**2.5.5.7 Channel 17 Action:** Channel 17 shall have the right to demand the patron cease to use, produce or retransmit archive material which, in Channel 17's sole opinion, conflicts with, interferes with or is detrimental to Channel 17's interests or reputation, or which might subject Channel 17 to unfavorable publicity or regulatory action, or which may violate any law, infringe the rights of any person, or subject Channel 17 to liability for any reason. Upon notice from Channel 17, the patron agrees to immediately cease the use, production or retransmission of archive material.

### **Election Season Waiver**

**2.5.6.1 Waiver.** By appearing on a Channel 17 forum, all producers and guests will be presumed to agree to the following waiver, acknowledging the receipt and understanding of the policy guidelines outlined in this document. The waiver states:

*"I have read and understand the guidelines and restrictions on the use of Channel 17 facilities and equipment during election season and agree to comply with these guidelines."*

The complete Channel 17 Policies may be found [here](#).