12 TIPS FOR BIRD DOGS



Bird-dogging means seeking out a candidate or elected official in person, asking where they stand on an issue, and getting their answer on record.

It's a way for everyday people to hold officials accountable–and influence their positions.

1 Arrive early

This is especially important if the candidate is very popular, leading in the polls, or if it is late in the primary season. In situations where there is a question and answer period, it will be important for you to be close enough to the candidate so that you are in his or her line of sight.



2 Have your question ready

Get input from family and friends about the best way to frame a question. Practice asking it to yourself. Make certain your question is brief, fact based, and direct.



3 Ask your question early

At events where there is a question and answer period, most people in the audience will not raise their hand immediately. If you indicate early interest, you are more likely to be called on.



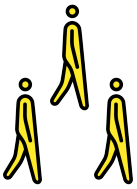
4 Stick your hand out

Candidates often walk through the crowd shaking hands and pausing for brief conversations. Be ready for these one-on-one opportunities. Position yourself in the candidate's path.



5 Work in teams of two or more and disperse

Since bird-dogging can make people nervous, it is good to go in teams of two or more people. One person asks the question while another writes down the candidate's response or captures it on video. Dispersing at the event will improve the odds that more than one of your group will get to ask a question. Be prepared to ask a follow-up question if you feel like the candidate dodged a question or you want more details. Come prepared with more than one question, as someone may ask your question before you get the chance.



6 Know the candidate's positions

Ask a question that shows you know something about the candidate's position, and that you want to know more. Don't waste your opportunity by asking a "softball" question. Choose a topic that you want him or her to move on, and formulate a question on that topic.



7 Be calm and reasonable

Maintaining a respectable tone will bring a more positive response from the candidate, their staff, and any media present. Getting angry, sarcastic, or emotional will generally result in being ignored. You can even preface your question with a comment on something the candidate has done well, before proceeding to your question.



8 Take Notes

The only way to track the responses of candidates is to have a record of what they said. It is also helpful to have notes when you are trying to frame a follow-up question.



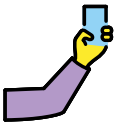
9 Be prepared to speak with the media

Generally speaking, journalists like to speak to folks who have asked the candidate a question. Remember to stay on message when talking to reporters by talking about the issue that is important to you. For example, if the reporter asks, "What do you think of Senator Firefly?" respond, "I'd like him to say more about how he proposes to abolish nuclear weapons worldwide." Don't be afraid to approach reporters even if they have not approached you. Try positioning yourself next to a reporter and striking up a conversation, again remembering to stay on message.



10 Be the media

Use your smartphone, camera, or other device to record your interactions with the candidate. If it's good, post it on Instagram, YouTube, X, Bluesky or other social media. (If it's not good, keep it to yourself.)



11 Be creative and improvise when necessary

Bird-dogging is not just about asking questions. Street theater, or even a simple picket sign, can raise public and candidate awareness on key issues. These tactics are especially helpful at events where you are prevented from entering or if you are well known to the candidate or his or her staff.



12 Share what you have learned

After the event is over, pass on to others what you have learned by using your own email lists, social media, and campaign organizations.



Questions about bird-dogging?

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