

Utah Debate Commission

Advisory Board Charter

Mission

The Utah Debate Commission is a non-partisan, independent initiative with the mission to provide objective, accessible, and high-quality candidate debates for federal and statewide elected offices in Utah, promoting civic engagement, voter education, and informed public discourse.

Introduction

The Utah Debate Commission (the “Commission”) is a collaborative, nonpartisan initiative established to provide candidate debates for federal and statewide elected offices that are objective, accessible, and of high quality.

The Commission is housed within the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah (the “Hinckley Institute”).

The Commission is supported by an Advisory Board (the “Board”) composed of representatives from institutions of higher education, media organizations, and other civic stakeholders in Utah. The Board provides strategic guidance, stakeholder perspectives, and recommendations to support the Commission’s mission.

The Board serves in an advisory capacity only and does not exercise governing authority over the Commission or the Hinckley Institute.

Administration of the Commission

The Utah Debate Commission is administered by the Hinckley Institute of Politics at the University of Utah.

The Hinckley Institute is responsible for the operational management of the Commission, including:

- Planning and execution of debates
- Administration of Commission activities
- Coordination with participating institutions and media partners

The Advisory Board provides guidance and recommendations to support these activities but does not exercise governing or operational authority.

ARTICLE 1

Name and Definitions

1.1 Name

The organization shall be known as the Utah Debate Commission.

1.2 Definitions

Board Members

Individuals selected to serve on the Utah Debate Commission Advisory Board.

Board

The collective membership of the Utah Debate Commission Advisory Board.

Committee Chair

Each committee shall select a chair from among its members. The committee chair is responsible for facilitating committee meetings and helping communicate committee recommendations.

A representative of the Hinckley Institute shall coordinate the work of each committee.

ARTICLE 2

Purpose of the Commission

The Utah Debate Commission was created to support the organization and presentation of candidate debates for federal and statewide elected offices in Utah.

2.1 Objectives

The Commission seeks to:

- Ensure that candidate debates for federal and statewide elected offices are objective, accessible, and of high quality.
- Promote broad geographic accessibility and statewide engagement by hosting debates at degree-granting higher education campuses throughout the state.
- Foster civic engagement, voter education, and public discourse through structured debates and related activities.

2.2 Debate Organization

The Commission will organize a minimum of one general election debate for each:

- U.S. Senate race

- U.S. House of Representatives races
- Utah Gubernatorial race
- Utah Attorney General race

The Commission may also organize debates for other statewide races as appropriate.

Debates may be hosted by educational institutions in Utah and broadcast by television, radio, or digital media outlets serving the state.

2.3 Candidate Participation Threshold

To promote manageable and meaningful debates, candidates may be invited to participate if they demonstrate a meaningful level of public support.

For general debates, one measure of such support, candidates receiving ten percent (10%) or more in a poll commissioned by the Commission during August or September of the election year may be invited to participate in the scheduled debates.

For primary debates, if more than five candidates qualify for the primary debate, only candidates who demonstrate a meaningful level of public support will be invited to the debate. As one measure of such support, candidates receiving ten percent (10%) or more in a poll commissioned by the Commission during May or June of the election year may be invited to participate in the scheduled debates.

The Commission may consider additional relevant factors when determining final participation in order to ensure fair, informative, and productive debates.

2.4 Primary Election Debates

The Commission may organize primary election debates for the offices described in Section 2.2 under the following circumstances:

1. There are at least two candidates qualified by party rules or applicable state laws to appear on the primary election ballot.
2. The party holding a primary had a candidate who met the participation threshold in the Commission-sponsored debate for that office during the previous election cycle.

The format, location, and media coverage of any primary election debate will be determined by the Commission in consultation with participating partners and with input from the Advisory Board.

ARTICLE 3

Advisory Board Composition and Role

3.1 Role of the Advisory Board

The Advisory Board provides guidance, recommendations, and stakeholder perspectives to support the work of the Commission.

The Board serves in an advisory capacity only. The Board does not have governing, fiduciary, or operational authority over the Commission or the Hinckley Institute.

Final decisions regarding Commission policies, operations, and activities remain with the Hinckley Institute.

3.2 Membership

The Advisory Board shall include representatives from institutions of higher education, media organizations, and public stakeholders in Utah.

Higher Education Representatives

Each of the following institutions of higher education may appoint a representative to serve on the Advisory Board:

- University of Utah
- Utah State University
- Weber State University
- Salt Lake Community College
- Utah Valley University
- Brigham Young University
- Southern Utah University
- Utah Tech University

Media Representatives

Each of the following media organizations may appoint a representative to serve on the Advisory Board:

- Deseret News
- Salt Lake Tribune
- BYU-TV
- ABC4
- KSL5
- Fox13
- KUTV
- PBS Utah

Legislative Appointments

The leaders of the majority and minority caucuses of the Utah State Senate may each appoint one member to serve on the Advisory Board.

3.3 Responsibilities of Board Members

Board members contribute to the success of the Commission by providing guidance and support, including:

- Offering recommendations regarding the planning, format, and timing of debates during election cycles.
- Sharing perspectives from their organizations and communities.
- Supporting outreach and engagement with media outlets, educational institutions, and civic partners.
- Assisting with coordination and collaboration among participating institutions
- Providing feedback on Commission activities and identifying opportunities to strengthen civic engagement and voter education.

All guidance or recommendations provided by the Board are advisory and non-binding.

3.4 Meetings

Advisory Board meetings provide an opportunity for members to discuss Commission activities and provide recommendations.

The Board may meet:

- Every other month during even-numbered years
- Quarterly during odd-numbered years

Meetings may be held in person, virtually, or through other communication methods determined by the Hinckley Institute.

Notice of meetings will typically be provided at least two business days prior to the meeting.

3.5 Terms

Board members may serve four-year terms, which may be renewed.

A member's term may conclude earlier in the event of:

- Resignation
- Replacement by the appointing organization

- Incapacity
- Other circumstances preventing continued service

If a vacancy occurs, the organization or entity that made the original appointment may designate a replacement.

3.6 Service Expectations

Advisory Board members are expected to:

- Participate in scheduled meetings when possible
- Provide constructive input and recommendations regarding Commission activities
- Serve as ambassadors for the mission of the Utah Debate Commission within their respective institutions and communities
- Support collaboration among participating organizations

Service on the Advisory Board is voluntary and without compensation unless otherwise determined by the Hinckley Institute.

ARTICLE 4

Advisory Committees

4.1 Establishment of Committees

The Commission or the Advisory Board may form committees or task forces to assist in reviewing issues related to:

- Debate planning
- Outreach and public engagement
- Media coordination
- Other activities that support the mission of the Commission

Such committees serve in an advisory capacity.

4.2 Committee Leads

Committees will be overseen and organized by the team leads as designated by the Hinckley Institute.

4.3 Committee Records

Committees may prepare summaries or minutes of their meetings and share them with the Advisory Board and the Hinckley Institute for informational purposes.

ARTICLE 5

Amendments

This Charter may be updated or revised as needed to reflect the evolving work of the Commission.

Proposed amendments may be reviewed by the Advisory Board and adopted by the Hinckley Institute.