

Guide: Set up a Chapter Debate!

It's official: Bernie Sanders is running for president in 2020!

Now it's time for DSA to decide whether or not we want to endorse him, and whether we want to dedicate resources to an independent, national DSA campaign for Bernie. In the next few weeks, DSA will be sending a straw poll to all DSA members asking us whether or not we think the NPC should endorse Bernie. This poll will be open for one week, after which time the NPC will vote on the endorsement, taking the results of that straw poll into account.

During the next 3 weeks, we encourage DSA chapters to organize in-person meetings to discuss and debate:

- A National endorsement of Bernie by the NPC
- Chapter-level organizing for Bernie
- What your chapter's organizing for Bernie would look like if you choose to participate
- What other campaigns might you want to run in 2020, and how they might interact.

Debates can be a very important educational and political experience for members. They can:

- Help members develop their ideas
- Practice comradely disagreement and debate about a central issue for our movement
- Practice public speaking
- Help you develop plans for the future

It is crucial that our local chapters begin to discuss and debate these issues as soon as possible. For some in DSA, the choice seems very straightforward, and several chapters have already called on the NPC to endorse and run an independent campaign for Bernie. For others, the question is still and open and live debate. Regardless of where you fall, everyone in the socialist movement can agree that having open and robust debates around this issues is very important.

What these debates will look like depends very much on the context of your chapter. But what's most important is that these debates take place in person, include as many participants as possible, and are structured in a way that facilitates open and comradely discussion. To do this, we recommend dividing this discussion into sections to address each of the questions listed above.

- **First:** should the NPC vote to endorse Bernie Sanders? Why is the NPC considering Bernie Sanders and no other candidate?
- **Second:** if the NPC does endorse, would we like our chapter to participate in a campaign to elect Bernie Sanders?
- **Third:** what would the campaign in our chapter look like if we did choose to participate?
- **Fourth:** what other campaigns are we interested in running in 2020 and how could they interact?

For those facilitating these meetings, we would recommend the following. Allocate a specific amount of time to discuss each of these questions, and inform members about the specifics of that meeting agenda. Make sure that member speaking time is distributed equitably. One good way to do this is to tell everyone at the beginning of the meeting that each person will have 90 seconds to speak. Make sure someone is keeping time!

Before hosting this debate, you'll want to decide how you'll structure it.

Will you have people line up - for and against - or take open responses from the floor? If you take comments from the floor, make sure that you're hearing from all sides. A good way to do this is for the meeting chair to alternate asking the meeting for speakers for and against, or asking for direct responses to a previous comment. Be careful that you're not hearing from the same people too much, try to call on a diversity of members, and always prioritize balancing different approaches to the question.

Sample agenda for debate

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| <p>Welcome & Intro</p> <p><i>describe the endorsement process and how the debate will work. Introduce the facilitators and time keepers</i></p> | 15 minutes |
| <p>Question 1 should the NPC vote to endorse Bernie Sanders?</p> | 30 minutes |
| <p>Question 2 should our chapter endorse?</p> | 30 minutes |
| <p>Question 3 what would the campaign look like in our chapter if we did?</p> | 30 minutes |
| <p>Question 4 what other campaigns are we interested in running in 2020 and how could they interact?</p> | 30 minutes |
| <p>Closing</p> <p><i>Wrap up, what's the next step in the endorsement process? Remind people to vote in the straw poll!</i></p> | 15 minutes |