Questions to Ask Candidates

Below are sample questions for town halls, meetings with candidates, and other events. These sample questions and facts can also help you formulate your own which you can personalize.

Broad Science Questions

Federal Support for Science and Research

- The U.S. has long been considered a leader in innovation. However, our spending on R&D as a share of our GDP is less than other industrial countries. Also, China’s R&D investment grew four times faster than in the U.S. (17% vs. 4.7% from 2010-2017). What will you do to ensure the U.S. maintains its role as the global leader in innovation?
- A large majority of Americans believe elected officials should listen to scientists. How will you use the knowledge of these experts to inform your policy decisions?
- Much scientific research unrelated to COVID-19 has been disrupted or halted due to our nation’s response to the pandemic and because of social distancing. What is your plan to bring our nation’s scientific research back online and prioritized for this generation and next?
- 80% of Americans say it’s important for the federal government to incentivize private sector investment in science and technology R&D. How will you support the role of the private sector?

Supporting Early Career Scientists and STEM Education

- U.S. 7th graders score only in the middle of other advanced nations in math and science. How will you work to make education in these areas a higher national priority?
- According to recent data from the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), Black Americans and Latinos together comprise only 13% of all doctorates earned in science and engineering fields. What steps would you take to improve access to STEM education so our scientific workforce becomes more diverse and representative of our nation as a whole?
- Foreign-born scientists make up a third of our nation’s scientific workforce and are critical to its functioning. What is your position on immigration and work visas for students and professionals in the STEM fields?

Medical and Public Health Research Questions

Research and Development (R&D) for Medical Progress

- Federal spending on medical and health R&D amounts to approximately $43 billion, representing about 1% of the federal budget. Spending on national defense, at about $629 billion, represents approximately 14%. Yet research protects and saves American lives. What are your views on the importance of investment in research?
- A total of 20% of Americans are impacted by rare diseases, but for most rare diseases, there are no cures and few, if any, proven and effective treatments. How do you plan to address this challenge?
- Clinical trials across the country have been disrupted by COVID-19, stalling the development of potential treatments and cures for cancer, heart disease, chronic kidney disease, Alzheimer’s, and many other diseases. What will you do to jump-start these trials and other medical research impacted by COVID-19?
The private sector finances nearly 70% of all health-related R&D investment in the U.S., turning basic science in areas such as genetic sequencing and immunology into tangible medical advances. How will you support the role of the private sector in medical advances?

Public health experts across the country have been working 24/7 to respond to COVID-19. Much of their support comes from the CDC which has been poorly funded for decades. How will you ensure our public health system has the resources it needs to respond to future pandemics?

COVID-19 has caused disproportionate harm to Black Americans and Latino Americans and called increased attention to long-standing health disparities. What will you do to help end racial and ethnic health disparities?

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have negatively affected mental health and created new barriers for people already suffering from mental illness and substance abuse. How will you support research around mental health and substance abuse?

Public health officials warn we need to work more closely with countries around the globe to prevent and contain future pandemics. How will your work support the U.S. role in global health?

For information to develop questions on additional topics including climate change, social and behavioral science, space exploration and more check out the Science Policy Resources page.