

CFUW's Defence of Democracy and The Politics of Rage

Safety Guidelines for All Candidates Meetings (ACMs)

Submitted by

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While supporting my home Club through an All Candidates Meeting (ACM), the Club President and I came face to face with the Politics of Rage (the use of anger and resentment as a political tool to mobilize support and influence public opinion. This approach often exploits societal divisions and grievances.).

The Club President was subjected to threatening emails and defamatory statements by candidates and their supporters (they were so upsetting that she reported them to the police) and we were both on the receiving end of a candidate's wife's diatribe and threats to destroy the reputation of CFUW, all because, in a bizarre set of circumstances, we were unable to livestream the event through an impartial third party and we refused a candidate's 'help' livestreaming the meeting instead, citing the clear conflict of interest.

At a second ACM organised by another group, the livestreaming by the candidate went ahead, however, the moderator and at least three of the candidates withdrew, citing lack of impartiality and conflict of interest. To add to the insults directed at CFUW, the candidate livestreamed under the CFUW name.

When discussing these incidents with Ontario Club executives, it came to light that many Clubs have encountered similar disrespect for the process, more violent threats and acts by the public which have put both CFUW volunteers and candidates lives at risk while holding ACMs.

Why has Ontario Council and National not been made aware of this?

It is untenable that CFUW Club members should be subjected to threats and reprisals when our goal is to uphold and support democratic processes. Some Clubs, including my own, are taking a hard look at organizing any ACM in the future. However, they recognize that is exactly what this rage and disrespect is all about – destroying the underpinnings of democracy.

I don't advocate for CFUW Clubs stopping ACMs. But I do advocate for setting clear goals for candidates and their supporters' behaviour and involving municipal and provincial officials in upholding the safety of both candidates and the volunteers.

Before Your ACM

I suggest that Clubs take pre-emptive action by holding training sessions for the volunteers and discuss potential problems and problem solutions, laying out ground rules for proper decorum for the candidates and their supporters, and advising police that you are holding an ACM (provide the address, meeting date and time and candidates' list) in advance of the meeting. Where finances allow (and you may ask candidates and the public to make contributions), hire a security detail.

What should you do if you run into a situation where you are in the ACM and threats and violence become a real risk? **Ontario Council suggests the following:**

1 Maintain Personal Safety First

- **Do Not Physically Intervene:** Volunteers should **never** engage in physical contact or try to physically restrain or block an aggressive individual.
- **Maintain Distance:** Step back to a safe distance while keeping eyes on the individual.

- **Keep Exits Clear:** Position yourself near exit routes and ensure you are not cornered or trapped.

2 Practice Calm De-Escalation (If Safe to Do So)

- **Low & Steady Tone:** Speak in a calm, neutral, and firm voice. Avoid shouting, arguing, or matching the person's anger/tone.
- **Non-Threatening Posture:** Keep hands visible, open, and at waist level. Avoid crossing arms, pointing fingers, or invading personal space.
- **Acknowledge without Validating Aggression:** Use neutral statements like:

"I hear your frustration, but we need to keep this meeting respectful so everyone can be heard."

- **Set Clear Boundaries:** Gently remind them of the decorum guidelines:

"Sir/Madam, line/floor rules require all questions to be asked respectfully without personal attacks or disruptions."

3 Immediately Signal the Moderator or Lead Event Organizer

- **Use Pre-Arranged Signals:** If a signal (e.g., hand signal, walkie-talkie cue, or specific phrase) was established in pre-event training, use it to alert the Moderator, Event Chair, or Lead Volunteer.
- **Support the Moderator's Call:** The Moderator holds the authority on the floor. If the Moderator pauses the event or issues a warning, volunteers should support the flow by guiding attention back to the stage or assisting audience members if necessary.

4 Alert Venue Security or Law Enforcement

- **Know Who Has the Call:** A designated lead volunteer or venue coordinator should immediately be alerted to contact building security or call emergency services (911 / local emergency number).
- **When to Call Instantly:** Call emergency services immediately if:

- There is an explicit verbal threat of physical harm or violence.
- Weapons are seen or mentioned.
- A physical altercation or property destruction begins.
- An individual refuses to leave after being formally asked to exit by the Chair/Moderator and continues hostile behavior.

5 Assist with Room Safety and Evacuation

- **Pause/Recess the Meeting:** If the situation escalates, the Chair or Moderator should formally call a temporary recess or declare the meeting adjourned.
- **Guide Attendees & Candidates:**
 - Direct candidates and audience members to safe areas or exits if necessary.
 - Keep crowd movement calm and orderly to avoid panic.
 - Ensure priority assistance is given to elderly attendees or those with mobility needs.

6 Document the Incident Post-Event

- **Observe Details:** Note key details while fresh in your mind (e.g., approximate time, specific words/threats spoken, physical appearance, sequence of events).
- **Complete an Incident Report:** Provide notes to the event organizing committee and venue management or speak to law enforcement if an official report is filed.

Above all, do not put you or your volunteers at risk.

Make sure everyone knows what the ground rules are, what the boundaries are and what the consequences of violating the rules are. Democracy is worth defending but so must be the wellbeing of our members.

If you and your Club have encountered problems in the past, please let us know. Although we are unable to help now, documenting these challenges will help us when we discuss ACMs with the appropriate authorities. Ontario Council will be modifying our election toolkit to cover the points above.