

2012 Precinct Caucus Training Manual



The Basics

In order to participate in the Iowa Caucuses, you must meet the following criteria:

- Citizen of the United States
- At least 18 years old on election day (November 6th, 2012)
- Registered to vote with a party affiliation (either Republican or Democrat). You may register to vote or change your party registration the evening of the caucus.

Caucus locations are determined by the local county party and might take place in one central location or may be broken up with individual precincts meeting in locations scattered throughout the county. Information about your specific location will be posted in your local newspaper or can be found online at the websites of your political party (www.iowagop.org/caucus or www.iowademocrats.org).

As you arrive on caucus night, there will be caucus volunteers working to check everyone in based on their current lists of party registration for each precinct. If you are already registered with a party, you should be on this list but please bring your voter registration card and a photo ID. If you are not registered to vote or would like to switch your party affiliation, you can also do this as you arrive, but come early to take care of this before the start of the caucus. This can also be accomplished prior to the caucuses through your county auditor.

As the meeting begins, you should be surrounded by your neighbors. A precinct is not a very large geographical area, so you should recognize many of the faces in the room. Someone will call the meeting to order as the temporary chairperson and then immediately move towards electing a permanent chairperson for the meeting. This will include a nomination process and then voting if there are multiple candidates. Often this is an uncontested position held by someone that has been through and understands the process. However, if you are interested in holding this position, don't be afraid to pursue it; a simple agenda of the meeting makes chairing the caucus a manageable task. The precinct caucus is not meant to be the most formal step in the election process and does not necessitate the strictest adherence to parliamentary procedure but rather a basic understanding of the fundamentals.

The next item on the agenda for the caucus is the election of a secretary. This job is simple yet important because the statutory functions of the caucus must be recorded. The same process of nomination and election will take place to fill this position. After the secretary is elected, he/she will be given a number of forms to fill out that ensure that all of the necessary information from the meeting is recorded in an easy to understand format. Each form will be used for a separate item.

These first two elections take place to facilitate the true purposes of the precinct caucus.

The Purpose

The purpose of the precinct caucus has five components:

- Elect individuals to serve on the county party central committee.
- Elect individuals to serve as delegates to the county convention.
- Discuss principles, values and issues that you want to see in your county party's platform.
- Elect members to serve on committees at the County Convention.
- Discuss and vote for the field of candidates running for President.

Presidential Politics

One purpose of the precinct caucus is to cast support for a presidential hopeful in your party's presidential primary during a presidential election cycle. This is the single largest factor that will drive people to the precinct caucuses. Most people leave after the presidential vote. However, voting your faith and values for delegates and precinct committee persons as well as ensuring that your party platform is pro-life and pro-family are very important. Please stay to the end.

The way the presidential nomination process works is very different for Republicans and Democrats. For the Republicans, the Presidential Caucus is just a straw poll with some added weight in the delegate selection process. There will be an opportunity for a representative from each campaign to speak on behalf of the candidate. However, if there is no one present to speak, you may stand up and speak in favor of the candidate that you support. Following the speeches, a vote will be taken on secret ballots. There might be subtle differences at your precinct caucus but this will be the standard format.

For the Democrats, the Iowa caucus has more components. The various campaigns will set up with their supporters together. In the early stages of this process, the key is to reach "viability." Viability is a threshold set at 15% of the total number present. Any candidate that does not receive support from at least 15% of the caucus attendees is not considered viable and the other campaigns will begin lobbying for their supporters. Selection of delegates to the county convention is often tied in to this process in a contested primary and becomes a bargaining chip in the negotiations between non-viable candidates and those lobbying for their support. This often takes place as an offer to set aside a certain number of delegate positions for the non-viable candidates' supporters. The length of this process is really determined by the chair of the caucus. The selection of delegates then takes place from among the various groups. The larger the group, the more delegates they will be allowed to choose.

Precinct Committee Persons

The next item on the agenda will likely be the nomination and election of the precinct committee persons. These individuals will represent your precinct on the county central committee of your party. The responsibilities of this position include the following at varying levels:

- Voting member of the county central committee
- Catalyst for political activity in your precinct (possibly including fundraising)
- Voter Registration
- Precinct organization for campaign efforts
- Voter turnout on election day
- Recruitment of volunteers (poll watchers, election boards, etc.)
- Fill candidate vacancies for your party as the need arises
- Assist with the next caucus

This position will be filled through nomination and election. The committee persons serve for two years and have an opportunity to shape their party and what it stands for as evidenced by its message and activities.

Election of Delegates and Alternates

The next function of the caucus is to elect delegates to the county convention. The number of delegates to be selected from your precinct can be determined by talking to your current county party chairperson prior to the caucus. Or, the chair of the caucus will inform you at this stage of the meeting. It is important to have as many like-minded individuals as possible serve as delegates so that our values are the ones that are represented in the party. If you are willing to serve as a delegate, recruit and bring people that will support you. The easiest way to be elected as a delegate is to bring friends to the caucus who live in the same precinct and will support you. In a Presidential election cycle, this position is more competitive than it is in a non-Presidential year and can be influenced by the candidate that draws the most support from your precinct.

Participants in the caucus are likely to support individuals that supported their candidate. Please also keep in mind that there is usually a small fee attached to being a delegate.

Your precinct will also elect alternate delegates for the county convention. This is done to ensure that the precinct is still represented if an elected delegate is unable to attend the county convention. This is more than just a feel good, inclusive role; many alternates will be credentialed at the county convention to fill vacant positions, so volunteer for this position or convince your friends to get involved. For either of these positions, delegate or alternate delegate, the key is to get elected and show up for the county convention because that is the only way that your voice, vote and values can be heard. It is also the only way to stay involved in the caucus to convention process as a delegate to the District and State Conventions as these delegates will be elected from the group of delegates that attend the County Conventions.

If you have children, there is a way to get them involved as well. Junior delegates are not elected, but they get to attend the conventions as well and go through the same process as the convention to write a party platform. This is a great way to get your children to think critically about their values and what they look like as public policies. It is also a great civics lesson.

The Platform and other Committees

The third function of the precinct caucus is to begin the process of creating a county platform by submitting ideas in the form of platform planks. At this point, there may or may not be much discussion of the planks depending on how the chair of your caucus chooses to proceed. Often, planks are collected for submission to the county platform committee. It is recommended that you come with your ideas in written form. Please keep them as clear and concise as possible. The platform is not necessarily your party's dream version of the Iowa code but should instead be the expression of your party's beliefs and values. You can find the current state platform for the Republican Party at <http://iowagop.org/rpi-platform/> or the Democrat Party at <http://iowademocrats.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/2010platform.pdf>.

The county platform will be crafted from the planks collected and submitted to the county platform committee. Different counties have different ways of building this committee so the best way to get on this committee is to ask the county chair about that county's process. Most counties have some sort of election process for this committee but it may or may not be held at the precinct caucuses. Either way, if you are interested in a position on this committee, you should come prepared to explain why you would be a good candidate. This is another reason to bring friends to support you.

There are three other county convention committees that help run the county convention.

- The rules committee sets the rules for how the convention will be run. This will include how long people are allowed to talk, how the drafted platform can be amended, and the particulars of parliamentary procedure.
- The credentials committee is charged with getting everyone properly checked into the county convention and providing the chair of the convention with an accurate count of credentialed delegates for the sake of voting and quorum determinations.
- The permanent organizations committee is responsible for outlining an agenda for the County Convention. Also, they are responsible for finding a parliamentarian to help apply the rules of the convention appropriately, a Sergeant at Arms to enforce the rules regarding who is allowed on the floor of the convention, a timer to keep track of speakers, and other various positions that help the convention flow smoothly.

These committees often provide an easier route for involvement because there are not as many people who desire to serve in these capacities.

Sample Caucus Agenda

1. Temporary Chair starts meeting and announces the purpose of the Caucus. Ensure that everyone has signed in on the computer sheets. If a person's name is not listed on the sheets they are required to fill out a voter registration form.
2. Ask for nominations for permanent Chair (hold election if necessary).
3. Count Votes, declare winner and record.
4. Ask for nominations for Permanent Secretary (hold election if necessary).
5. Count Votes, declare winner and record.
6. Open the floor for speeches on behalf of the presidential candidates.
7. Vote.
8. Count Votes, Record.
9. Announce Vote Totals.
10. Chair explains the role of Precinct Committee Persons.
11. Ask for nominations for Precinct Committee Persons.
12. Hold election, declare winners and record.
13. Explain about being a delegate to the County Convention.
14. Announce the number of delegates to be elected by the Precinct.
15. Ask for nominations for delegates to the County Convention.
16. Hold election, declare winners, record.
17. Explain about being an alternate delegate and the number to be elected.
18. Ask for nominations for alternate delegates to the County Convention.
19. Hold Election, declare winners, Record.
20. Explain about being a junior delegate (those who are younger than legal voting age).
21. Identify junior delegates, Record.
22. Consider any platform materials to send to the County Convention.
23. Elect County Convention committee members -IF- required by the County.

Caucus and Convention Standing Committees What Are They — And What Do They Do?

Platform Committee: The Platform Committee meets to put together a proposed platform for the entire caucus or convention delegation to discuss and subsequently vote on to form the official platform for each level; county, district, state, national. To determine the process for your county or your district, you must contact either your county chair (see listing of county chairs and co-chairs on your party website) or one of the state central committee members from your district (also found on state party websites). The process for electing a group of individuals to serve as a platform committee in each county varies greatly.

Credentials Committee: A Credentials Committee is either elected or appointed at each caucus or convention level. This committee is commissioned with the duties of credentialing the members to the convention. Their duties include signing in the delegates, making sure that the delegates have appropriate credentials, keeping a running total of delegates in attendance and reporting this number to the convention secretary and or chairman. This number is important to determine the accurate number necessary to achieve a majority.

The Credentials Committee must also be prepared to resolve any disputes regarding delegate status. It will be up to this committee to determine whether, during a dispute, a delegate should, or should not be seated.

Permanent Organization: The Permanent Organization Committee is charged with the duties of outlining the convention agenda as well as securing and/or selecting the caucus or convention officials. This may include the selection of: Convention Chair, Secretary, Parliamentarian, Time Keeper(s), Sergeant at Arms, etc.

Rules Committee: The Rules Committee is either appointed or elected and is given the responsibility of drafting the rules by which the body will conduct themselves. Typically the committee will be given a copy of previous rules to start with and they may choose to utilize them or to “start from scratch” when drafting rules for the upcoming meeting(s). Once the rules have been drafted they are merely proposed rules until such a time as the body has voted to make them the official rules of the caucus or convention. Prior to their adoption, the rules may be amended on the floor.

Dates to Remember:

Republican Party

Presidential Precinct Caucus:	January 3 rd , 2012
County Conventions:	March 10 th , 2012
District Statutory Caucuses:	April 21 st , 2012
Reconvening of the District Caucuses:	June 15 th , 2012
State Convention:	June 16 th , 2012

Democrat Party

Presidential Precinct Caucus:	January 3 rd , 2012
County Conventions:	March 10 th , 2012
District Conventions:	April 28 th , 2012
State Convention:	June 16 th , 2012



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