

Checklist for Organizing an Effective Event

You may have already voiced your support for the role of science in policymaking by writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper. You may have emailed your senator or local congressional representative. You may have called their offices or even visited them in person. But how do you show there is a whole community standing up for science? You can plan an event.

Events can motivate both your neighbors and local decision-makers to take action—whether at a community festival or event where you can discuss the issues with your elected official, a letter-writing party targeting your elected official, or a film screening or teach-in designed to broaden your network of allies.

The following checklist covers five key elements of an effective event.

1. Set Your Goal and Strategies

- Brainstorm with your planning group, and agree on concrete outcomes and benchmarks for success

Note: Remember that events can serve multiple purposes. They can be effective for attracting new members, raising funds, getting media attention, influencing policymakers, educating the public, and promoting dialogue on your issue. They can also serve as a springboard to direct action aimed at social or policy changes.

- Draft the top two or three takeaways for attendees. (This will shape the program, as well as promotional language that will set expectations for the event.)
- Identify your key audiences
- Take inventory of assets and connections that could help shape or support a successful event. (Consider resources such as venue locations, relationships with local organizations, connections with related policymakers, access to a/v equipment, etc. within your planning group, institution, and community.)

A well-organized event can motivate your neighbors and local decisionmakers to take action.

2. Design a Compelling Program

- Map out the best format and tone to meet your goals (i.e., a panel, rally, training, or teach-in)
- Identify the best voices and messengers for an informative and authentic discussion
- Match the content of the event to your benchmarks for success
- Identify all the venues and supplies needed to ensure the event runs smoothly
- Confirm that the design of your materials and the message they convey are consistent with your objectives and intended audiences
- Develop a timeline that breaks down all tasks (recruitment, materials, publicity, media, content, coordination with presenters and partners, etc.) and identifies those responsible for them to ensure attendees stay engaged from start to finish
- Conduct a walk-through of the event with your core goals in mind

3. Ensure the Event Is Inclusive

- Take time to learn about the communities most affected by the issue being discussed and how they are organizing to address it
- Explore any authentic, meaningful opportunities to collaborate with groups that represent these communities, or to amplify their stories and work
- Invite diverse speakers and ensure the program incorporates the perspectives of the most affected communities
- Ensure the language, tone, and format of your recruitment efforts are accessible to all intended audiences

4. Recruit and Promote the Event

- Make a “publicity pack” including all the information and materials needed to easily promote the event
- Consider the “four Cs of recruitment:” **connect** with people in a friendly way, provide **context** for the event and the importance of the issue being discussed, ask for a **commitment**, and find **common ground** with your invitees

Consider the “four Cs of recruitment”—connect, context, commitment, and common ground—to build excitement for your event and motivate people to attend.

- Brainstorm all promotional venues and tasks
 - Online: listservs, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, posts on Patch.com or community-based sites
 - Offline: flyers, canvassing, banners or tables in high-traffic public spaces, presentations at related meetings, press advisories for local newspapers

- Target specific invitees, and send personal invitations through individual emails, calls, or meet-ups
- Expand your reach by tapping into the personal connections of the event team or your partners

5. Keep the Momentum Going by Following Up

- Design clear next steps or actions that attendees can take after the event
- Create a mechanism for obtaining your attendees’ names, contact information, and issues of interest
- Develop the tools (e.g., take-home handouts) needed for attendees to remain engaged on the issue
- Follow up with all attendees and express your gratitude to everyone involved in the planning, program, and promotion
- Share highlights of the event with policymaker staff, local media, institution leaders, or other stakeholders
- Last but not least, be sure to celebrate all the hard work you and your team accomplished!