

Hosting a Public Education Event with Community Groups

An event that brings people together to learn about an issue is a great way to build community and interest in your advocacy efforts. Creating a welcoming learning environment, reaching out to the right people, and effective follow-up are keys to success.

1. Identify partners. Partnering with a community group is an excellent way to foster relationships, reach new people, and build power and influence. Begin by researching your topic thoroughly to identify the people most affected by attacks on science-based safeguards, reaching out to them, and inviting them to take part. Look to community centers, churches, environmental or civic organizations, social and environmental justice groups, neighborhood associations, and more. Many of these groups can be found online via social media, or check your local media for more information. Be inclusive, and recognize that it may take time to develop trusting relationships with those most affected due to a history of injustice.

Define mutual goals for the meeting and your work together. Make the relationship reciprocal and beneficial to all involved. Let others contribute to the event development and encourage people to step into leadership and coordinator roles. Allow partners to play to their strengths and contribute whatever efforts make the most sense for them. See our Strengthen Your Impact through Collaboration guide at www.ucsusa.org/CoordinateForImpact for additional considerations.

2. Select a location and plan event logistics. Make a ballpark estimate of the size of your event and choose a venue that will accommodate all of your attendees. Look into local community spaces. If you are a student, faculty, or employee of a local college, utilize space on campus. Try to find a venue that is centrally located, accessible by public transportation, or has easy and ample parking. Consider accessibility for hearing- or visually-impaired attendees, translation services, or babysitting needs. Provide accommodations for guest speakers, media, or other invited special guests. Ensure you are prepared for their audio/visual needs and test technology in advance.

Refreshments are always a perk. If funding is available, have the event catered (something as simple as pizza and salad). If there is limited budget, have a potluck, or provide coffee/tea

and cookies or donuts. Reach out to local restaurants or delis to see if they would consider donating food or discounting your order. Be willing to promote or advertise the restaurant to the audience (their potential customers) in exchange.

Do not take responsibility for everything. Discuss logistics with your partners and divide efforts by playing to their strengths and connections.

3. Create an outreach plan for the event. Take stock of all of the people and networks that you and your partners have, others that may be interested in this issue, and avenues where you can publicize the event. To guide your planning, try the following:

- Create a distribution list of your and your partners' contacts.
- Add relevant active email lists or Facebook groups where you could send out your event information.
- If you're at a campus or part of other groups that may be interested, set up a table to distribute information or hang up flyers.
- Connect with relevant blogs, Facebook groups, or use local hashtags on Twitter, or create a Facebook event or an Evite.
- *Be sure to be inclusive and reach out to those most affected by the issue at hand, not just technical experts and activists.*

4. Promote and publicize. Coordinate with your partners to send out:

- an initial invitation about one month ahead of the date;
- a reminder 2 weeks prior to the event; and
- another reminder early in the day of the event.

When people RSVP, capture information that may be useful in your campaign, for example, name, address, email, and experience with the issue. You could also collect this information at the event at a registration table or by passing a clipboard.

Social media can be used before, during, and after the event to get attention and share information. Encourage people to use social media at the event to promote what is happening in real time.

5. Follow up. Stay in touch with the attendees after the event. Create a Facebook group, an email chain, a Google group, or a LinkedIn community. Keep people updated with the efforts of the meeting. If there was a specific task or request of attendees, ask people to report back on what they experienced or accomplished.

Follow up within a week to share next steps with attendees. If there's material from the meeting—video, notes, pictures—share those as well and encourage others to do the same. You are building a community of people (and groups) that are working together for change.

If you have any questions as you develop your event, or to learn more about the Science Network, email ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org.