

Organizing an Event

Organizing an event can raise visibility, educate, and energize others to take action in support of your issue. A successful event will attract media attention and serve as an effective vehicle for communicating with key audiences. An event could be a community forum or panel presentation, an organizational meeting (e.g. an NCJW section meeting), a community-wide festival, a town hall meeting, or a rally. Educating the community through an event is a true community service.

TIPS FOR PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL EVENT

- ▶ **Be creative.** Maximize your impact with active and compelling events. Don't have a group of people gather inside a room if they can march on the street holding signs instead. Look for unusual ideas.
- ▶ Examples of noteworthy events include:
 - Rallies/marches/demonstrations
 - Legislative visits
 - Award programs
 - Petition drives or delivery events
 - Expert or celebrity appearances
 - Fundraising events, such as anniversary galas
 - Community action events, where individuals gather to take specific action in support of an issue, such as distributing information about contraception at a community festival
- ▶ **Invite ideas.** The best events often come from several minds. Brainstorm to generate the most promising event themes, speaker suggestions, program ideas, and outreach strategies.
- ▶ **Prepare key participants.** Designate key participants as spokespeople and make sure they are clear about the purpose and messages of the event. If you are holding an event like a rally or demonstration, provide participants with a one-page summary of your key messages as they arrive. This way, if a reporter speaks with a participant, he or she can be on message.
- ▶ **Find a hook for your event.** For example, link your event to observances/holidays. The media are often looking for fresh news related to recurring events such as Women's History Month (March) or religious holidays or even back-to-school time. Plan an event to capitalize on the media's need.
- ▶ **Alert the media.** Improve your publicity potential by distributing a media advisory to daily and weekly press. (See *Just the Facts: Write an Effective Media Advisory* section of this toolkit.)

- ▶ **Consider Logistics.** When planning your event, you should consider the following:
 - ▶ **Location and Venues for the event.**
 - Places of worship such as churches, synagogues, mosques, etc. are often conveniently located and provide room for large audiences. In addition, they highlight the faith-based connections to the issue.
 - Public spaces such as schools, town halls, public parks, or college campuses also feature sufficient space for a large audience and convenience.
 - Private spaces (private homes, restaurants, etc.), if they are located in a prominent location, provide a good venue for particular kinds of events. **Make sure these places are completely accessible to persons with disabilities.**
 - ▶ **Accessibility and attendance.** If you hope to attract a large crowd you should consider practicalities like parking and accessibility via public transportation. All efforts should be made to ensure that the event is accessible to persons with disabilities. If you do expect a large crowd, it is important that you have the proper permits (if necessary), enough volunteers to manage the crowd, and a sound system that will ensure that all those in attendance can hear.
 - ▶ **Impact.** To what extent do you want this event to make a public statement, generate media, or influence policy? The purpose of planning a large event is to raise awareness about your issue. If you are interested in making a strong statement on your community's local policies, consider holding your event in a prominent public location, thereby attracting the attention of the public and the media. Holding your event in front of the district office of your US senator is a great way to get his or her attention and to generate press coverage. If, on the other hand, the goal of your event is to give your own organization a forum to learn about and discuss these issues, members might feel comfortable in a more private setting.
 - ▶ **Utilizing Religion.** Your event can be a faith-based, a secular, or a combination event. For example, you can hold an event in a house of worship involving a diverse group of interfaith participants, sharing the views of their faith traditions. You might also invite secular organizations to join such an event, calling attention to the issue from both a faith and secular perspective. You do not need to hold such an event in a religious institution. You could gather the same speakers at a public venue such as the area in front of a decision-maker's office or a courthouse.
 - ▶ **Message of Event.** Determine the message for the event and decide who will best carry your message. Try to focus on only a few issues for greatest impact and set goals for the event at the outset. Build in an action step, so that people have some immediate way to take action on the issue of concern.

- ▶ **Speakers.** Invite speakers based on the time allotted for the event — don't over-program. The most effective events feature a diversity of speakers, each making a unique contribution to the program. Choose your speakers based on the issue you wish to emphasize at your event.
- ▶ **Timing.** In planning your event, deciding when it is held and how long it will last can greatly affect its impact, attendance, and reception. Think strategically about what might be happening in your community politically, and plan an event for a time when it might have the most impact on public opinion. Be sure to check community calendars to avoid possible conflicts with other events aimed at a similar audience.