

A GUIDE TO

HOSTING COMMUNITY ACTION MEETINGS

2017

Organizing for Action

Who is OFA?

Organizing for Action is a movement of millions of Americans, coming together to fight for real, lasting change. We are proud community organizers who are building this organization from the ground up, community by community, one conversation at a time—whether that’s on a front porch or on Facebook. We’re committed to finding and training the next generation of great progressive organizers, because at the end of the day, we aren’t the first to fight for progressive change, and we won’t be the last. This is bigger than just one person or one cause.

The 5 million Americans who’ve taken action with OFA are part of a long line of people who stand up and take on the big fights for social justice, basic fairness, equal rights, and expanding opportunity. That kind of progress is never easy. But we’re not here for the easy fights and we’re glad to have you join us.

OFA is as committed as we’ve ever been to defending the progress we’ve made over the past eight years and growing this movement for the long-term. As always, we’ll need your voice and your energy to effect real change. Now is the time for us to do what we do best—organize.

Why community action planning matters

We want to ensure that we have a strong foundation for our organizing work, so it’s vital that we regroup, reconnect, and build our chapters and teams in communities across the country. We are the entry point for your network of friends, community groups, people who worked on the campaign, and those who are ready to take action.

Our goal is to build relationships, and strengthen and expand our chapter membership by listening to people who are stepping up. We want to provide them with a menu of opportunities to get engaged in organizing work with OFA. As conveners in our communities, we want to bring people together, find out what their story is, what motivates them, what issues they care most about, and what changes they want to see in their neighborhoods.

We have the opportunity to be the model for what we want our communities to look like—to show people that we are stronger together and that we respect, empower and include everyone.

HOSTING COMMUNITY ACTION MEETINGS

I. EVENT ORGANIZING 101

Getting started

Great organizers build power by bringing people together. Organizers are able to connect people from different backgrounds, experiences, and skill levels and put them to use in an effective and strategic way. By providing a space for people to meet, you can discuss recent actions taken by Congressional leaders and the administration and the implications for your community. From there, you can determine the next steps you can take as a group. By taking the time to collectively plan and strategize, you and your team will be able to move forward with a deliberate and thought-out approach.

Goals

Your community action meeting should have the following goals in mind:

- Build a network of community members so you are ready to mobilize
- Provide an outlet for people to channel their energy in a positive way
- Identify the priority issues that need to be addressed in your community

Lock in logistics

Great organizers not only brainstorm creative and exciting ideas, but also invest a lot of time planning the different logistical aspects of their events and meetings. We will walk you through a number of steps to help you manage your event so you can achieve the above goals.

When will you host your event? Give yourself enough time to find a location, plan and recruit for your event. Be sure to check calendars so your proposed date doesn't interfere with holidays or important local events.

Who will make up your planning team? Organizers work best in teams. Think about people who can help you organize your meeting and assign responsibilities accordingly. For example, someone might have time to bring snacks, so put them in charge of getting snacks for the meeting. Someone else may have a network of friends they have worked with on the campaign, so they can help with recruitment.

Recruitment reigns supreme

Recruitment is one of your most important roles as a host. No meeting—no matter how well planned—can truly be successful without people there to participate. At its core, organizing is fundamentally about building relationships. The larger and more cohesive a group of people are working together to make change, the more effective and powerful they will be.

The way to recruit effectively is not magic; there is a formula and key steps you must follow if you're going to achieve your goals.

Recruiting someone to attend an event is not just getting a verbal commitment, or filling out a single online form. It is a continuous process of ensuring commitment all the way through the day of the meeting.

The first ask is a registration, or RSVP. When asking for someone to join your meeting, your event info should include the specific location, time, and date of your meeting.

The second ask is a confirmation. Every meeting will always have a number of people that are unable to make it, but by taking these steps, you can actively reduce that number:

- After the initial RSVP, you should send out a confirmation email and give them a phone call a week before your meeting.
- Remind your guest of the upcoming meeting and tell them that you're looking forward to seeing them. Be sure to remind them of the date, time, and location of the event. Ask them if they have any questions as to the location or the agenda, and remind them that you'll give them a final reminder the day before the event.
- You can also provide additional information—like specific directions or bringing a snack for a potluck

**Consider making it a potluck so that there are refreshments and light snacks, and everyone has a way to participate.*

The third ask is a final reminder. This is less of an ask and more of a friendly reminder. The day or two before the event takes place, it is always very helpful to send a reminder to confirmed participants that provides key details, dates and times, and what they should expect at the event. Again, this will help increase the attendance rate and reduce the number of people who don't show up to your meeting.

Who to invite?

At OFA, we respect, empower and include everyone. We want to become the model for what we want our communities to be, so what does that look like for your area?

Start by making a list of people you know:

- Friends and neighbors—people who may now be ready to take action
- Faith or school groups and community organizations are also great resources

Next, reach out to your community. You can find them by:

- Posting your event on [OFA's website](#). If you don't have an account, click on the "Sign In" tab in the top right corner.
 - 1) **Enter the zip code where the event will take place**
Note: if you are hosting at a private residence and prefer not to share the address publicly, just write "Address provided upon RSVP" in the street address field. Be sure to follow up with everyone who has RSVP'd to make sure they know where to go.
 - 2) **Event type: Action Planning Session**
 - 3) **Event title**
E.g. "Join us for a community action meeting"
 - 4) **Event description**
E.g. "If you are ready to take action against efforts that strike at the heart of our shared values, then join us for an organizing meeting. We'll be discussing the implications of recent actions for our community and plan our next steps."
- Share your event to the relevant state group on [Connect](#)—OFA's online tool for volunteers to share information.
- Direct message people on Facebook or Twitter who want to take action

Getting your ducks in a row

At the end of this host guide, you will find a few materials to make your experience as a host easier:

- **Checklist:** a checklist to help you organize your event. You will not need everything on this list, but it's a helpful guide to make sure you don't forget anything!
- **Agenda:** a suggested outline of how your meeting could go
- **Sign-in sheet:** for attendees to check in so you have their contact information for the future

The day of...

Be prepared before your first guest arrives:

- Set up your space early
- If you have them, set out refreshments and snacks for your guests to help make them more comfortable and break the ice
- Have your materials printed and ask people to sign in so you can have a record of all the guests who attend—it'll help you follow up with folks after your event
- Prepare your discussion (some suggestions are below)
- Set up 1:1 meetings with supporters who are ready to commit to take action

Discussion questions

Here are a few questions to help you focus your conversation and start planning to take action in your community. Remember to always respect, empower and include everyone and to encourage all your attendees to participate in the conversation.

- **What are the norms to set for your meeting?**
 - “Norms” are basic (but necessary!) meeting guidelines, like “We won’t speak while someone else is talking.”
 - If everyone understands these norms up-front, it’s easier to guide your conversation back to them and make sure your meeting ends productively.
- **What’s the experience level of people in the room?**
- **What are you hoping to get out of joining OFA?**
- **What issues are you interested in working on in your community?**
- **What are the goals you would like to set for your group?**
- **What actions could you and your group take this week? What are actions you can take in two weeks?**
- **Who are the coalitions and partners you have or would like to work with?**
 - These relationships will be very important in the work to come, so having a good understanding of who they are and what the plan is to reach out to them is key.
- **What other materials and resources do you need to be successful?**

After your meeting

Don’t forget your organizing fundamentals and follow up:

- Thank your attendees
 - Outline any next steps that were agreed upon at your meeting. Make sure to include the specific responsibilities that each volunteer agreed to take on—it’s a good idea to have these in writing to hold people accountable.
- Follow up with 1:1 calls with prospective volunteers who did not sign up during your meeting
 - A 1:1 is an intentional, pre-scheduled meeting (about 30-45 minutes)—in this case, it’s likely an introductory 1:1. You can take the time to get to know someone on a much more personal level where you can share stories and really understand what is motivating them to get involved. 1:1s are about listening. The organizer or volunteer leader should absorb where the other person is coming from and seek to understand what they are saying.
- Create and log your attendees information into a list so that you have a record of participants—these may be the people who start a new chapter with you!
- Report back to us **using this form**.
 - Please share successes you had and the best practices you used to recruit folks for your meeting!
 - Please email us if you have any trouble accessing the link

II. COMMUNITY ACTION MEETING AGENDA

This is a suggestion—feel free to update or modify as needed.

Welcome and Introduction (10 min.)

Introduce yourself and ask your guests to sign in. Thank everyone for coming! Have your guests introduce themselves—this can just be their name as they can share more about themselves later on during the meeting.

Share Your Story (5 min.)

Take a couple minutes to share your own story and why you decided to host this meeting. Sharing personal stories is a great way to build relationships with guests and to create common experiences. It's a good time to talk about the urgency of the moment and especially now, why it's so important to continue to organize around the issues.

Hear From Your Guests (20 min.)

Use this opportunity to ask your guests to share their stories. Ask them about the issues they are most interested in organizing around. This gathering will be a great chance to brainstorm and discuss the issues and work that can most impact your community.

Open Up the Discussion (30-40 min.)

We are in a new and unexpected reality—probe for information that will help you grow your team and build your membership as well as help identify the needs in your community.

See discussion questions above

Next Steps and Close (10 min.)

These meetings are about personal interactions and developing relationships with people within your community. As a leader, you are in the best position of anyone to ask your friends and neighbors to get involved.

Ask them what action step are they going to take after the meeting?

- Commit to join **Connect**. Start with your state group and OFA News Group and then they can choose the issue groups they are interested in joining
- Commit to **join the OFA Monthly Volunteer call**, held on the first Monday of each month
- Commit to volunteer at a future event or day of action
- Commit to becoming a leader within your chapter
- Commit to scheduling a 1:1 meeting with you

III. COMMUNITY ACTION MEETING CHECKLIST

Before the event

Choose a location

- Determine if this will be at your house or at a public space (local restaurant, coffee shop, library or community center)
- If at a public location, contact the establishment ahead of time to let them know you are coming and how many people you are expecting

Create your event on OFA's website

- Create an account on ofa.us if you don't have one already
 - Click on the "Sign In" tab in the upper right corner
- Use the event type "Action Planning Session" when creating your event
- Title E.g.: "Join us for a community action meeting"
- Sample event description: "If you feel spurred to action by recent events, join us for a meeting to discuss the implications in our community."
- Fill out the When and Where sections. The host mailing and contact info sections are optional.
Note: if you are hosting at a private residence and prefer not to share the address publicly, just write "Address provided upon RSVP" in the street address field. Be sure to follow up with everyone who has RSVP'd to make sure they know where to go.

Post your event on Connect

- You can use your login for ofa.us to sign on to Connect
- Go to the state or local group(s) that is most relevant to you to let other Connect members know that you are hosting a community action meeting
- Check out the Connect New User Guide for more information about how to use Connect

Confirm your guests

- Call everyone who has RSVP'd the day before your meeting
 - Let them know what to expect
 - Provide any special directions or instructions
 - Let them know if you need them to bring anything (ie, items for a potluck)
- Follow up with an email with the address and other details, so it is in written form

Print materials

- Agenda
- Sign in sheets
- Name tags (if applicable)
- Anything else you need to make your event a success

Inventory (pull together all of the applicable materials ahead of your event)

- Printed materials (from above)
- Pens and markers
- OFA placards (if you have them)
- Snacks and beverages
- Cups, napkins, and plates
- Computer (if applicable)
- Power cables for all devices (if applicable)

During the event

- Make sure everyone signs in and has an agenda**
- Establish group norms and expectations**
- Share your stories**
- Outline next steps**

After the event

- Clean up**
- Share the feedback from your meeting with us**
- Thank your attendees**
- Log your attendees' information to your team list**
- Follow up with those who committed to action. Be specific in your follow up ask:**
 - Join Connect
 - Commit to volunteer at a future event or day of action
 - Commit to becoming a leader within your chapter
 - Schedule a 1:1 meeting with you

