



Hosting a Community Meeting

Hosting a Community Meeting

A community meeting can serve several purposes; it can highlight a specific issue of concern, draw people together in response to a crisis, determine interest in starting a coalition or enlarge an existing coalition. This chapter provides information on several types of meetings and key elements to consider when planning a community meeting. Tools and tips as well as resource samples and Web sites are provided to assist coalitions in the successful implementation of a community event.

Strategies to engage the media are often key to the overall success of a meeting. This chapter provides tools to assist in the development of press releases and public service announcements, which are essential elements in drawing the community to an event and introduces the concept of media advocacy. A sample press release, public service announcements and release forms are provided as well as a generic *Meeting Planning Checklist*.

A detailed summary of meeting preparations is provided at the University of Kansas Community Toolbox Web site: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools//sub_section_main_1113.htm

Types of Meetings

Informational Meeting

A typical informational meeting focuses on educating the public on issues of concern. Such meetings might be organized to bring citizens together in response to a community crisis such as an increase in teen suicides. Informational meetings are also held during the formation of a coalition or when an existing coalition is seeking to raise public awareness or recruit new members. Informational meetings are usually informal, require very little funding, involve limited preparation and have no standard format or agenda.

Town Hall Meeting

A town hall meeting is a public meeting convened to educate the community about a specific issue or problem. The format of the meeting is structured to encourage dialogue with key community representatives who are knowledgeable about the problem. Attendees are encouraged to give input on actions that may be taken in order to resolve the issue at hand.

In 2006 and 2008, numerous Wisconsin coalitions hosted town hall meetings as part of a federally funded prevention initiative targeting underage drinking. The Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources developed a booklet, *Wisconsin Town Hall Meetings – Summary Report*, which included a list of the communities that held Town Hall Meetings in 2006, lessons learned and other related information.

This publication can be viewed at: <http://wcb.uhs.wisc.edu/docs/UAD/TownHallMeetings-2006Summary.pdf>

For complete information and the resources to host a Town Hall Meeting visit: www.stopalcoholabuse.gov

Family and Community Town Supper (FACTS)

The Family and Community Town Supper (FACTS) model is an innovative tool for facilitating youth, family and community dialogue. People from all age groups and walks of life meet to share a meal and discuss important issues. Generally, a brief topical presentation by a panel of speakers is followed by small group discussions that take place during the meal. The evening concludes with a facilitated large group discussion that often includes action steps and follow-up activities.

Toolkits are available, free of charge, to Wisconsin residents from the Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources. For more information, visit the following Web site: <http://wcb.uhs.wisc.edu/02-Programs/02-FACTS.html>

Grief and Concern Mobilize a Community into Action

In Beloit in the early 80's, a citywide Positive Youth Development collaborative was started after a young person was shot by another young person in one neighborhood. In the first year of the effort alone, juvenile crime decreased 25%. The impact was huge.

Sue Allen, Youth Development and Prevention Specialist, Marquette County, WI

Plunge

The Plunge is similar to the setting created at a town hall meeting but involves a longer time frame, commonly taking a full day. The extended meeting time allows participants the opportunity to become immersed in a topic through a series of experiential sessions designed to look at a particular problem from a variety of viewpoints and perspectives and at various locations. The Plunge was developed by Memorial Health System in South Bend, Indiana in 1998 as a way to recognize gaps in services for older adults. Building on the concept that originated in Indiana, Marshfield Clinic hosted its first Plunge that focused on underage drinking in Marshfield, WI, in September 2006.

Since then, Marshfield Clinic Center for Community Outreach has hosted several successful community plunges and has written a Plunge Planning Guide that includes a detailed timeline. A copy of this planning guide is provided on the CD that accompanies this workbook.

To read more about the history of Plunges visit the Memorial Health System Web site at: <http://www.qualityoflife.org/ich/plunge/plunge1.cfm>

World Café´

In a World Café meeting, participants join structured conversations at small tables in a relaxed atmosphere. As conversations unfold, people move between groups, sharing ideas relating to the issue being discussed. World Café meetings are designed to create a hospitable space in which to explore questions in a manner that encourages everyone to contribute.

For more information visit: <http://www.theworldcafe.com>

A Wisconsin World Café´ – Success is on the Menu!

It's exciting to be part of a world cafe and there are lots of adaptations. One important thing is to create a few key questions in advance. For instance, you might want to ask, "What are the reasons why people volunteer in our town and what is the best way to tap into that resource?" or "What do we need to understand about addiction to be effective?"

Check out the website and give it a try.

*Genevieve Kirchman, Safe and Drug Free Schools & Communities Project director,
CESA #5 (Cooperative Educational Service Agency), Portage, WI*

Media Advocacy

Media advocacy is the process of disseminating information through communication channels of the media, in order to bring about action, change policy, or influence the public's view of an issue.

- Ideally, coalition efforts to engage the media and draw the community to attend an event are conducted in the context of a comprehensive media advocacy plan.
- Strategic use of the media to shape public opinion, mobilize community members and influence decision makers is quite possibly the greatest impact of any public meeting.
- Creating awareness is the first step in mobilizing a community to action.
- The availability of media resources varies from one community to another depending upon demographics and geographic location.
- A media advocacy strategy that articulates a clear and consistent message can lead to a change in community norms.

Engaging the Media

A critical element in hosting a successful meeting is a well-developed and implemented plan to engage the media. Two key methods to accomplish this are press releases and public service announcements.

Press Release

A press release is a written or recorded statement provided to members of the media to announce an upcoming event or topic claimed to have news value. Effective press releases are short, ideally a page or less.

Public Service Announcement

A public service announcement (PSA) is a short, non-paid radio or television message that is intended to alert listeners to a community issue or motivate them to action.

Tools which are provided on the following pages include:

Tips on How to Write a Press Release

Sample Public Service Announcements

Meeting Planning Checklist

The enclosed workbook CD includes the tools listed above plus the following:

Invitation to an Informational Meeting: Your children, Our future

Invitation to an Informational Meeting: Tired of all the drama?

Invitation to a Town Hall Meeting: What's up with Alcohol – Barron County Safe & Stable Families Coalition

Invitation to a Plunge – Marshfield Area Coalition for Youth

Press Release Template

Sample Press Release for Town Hall meeting – Barron County Safe & Stable Families Coalition

Plunge Planning Guide

Media Advocacy Strategies

Develop good relationships with your media. Have regular communication with all media outlets so they know who you are and how to contact you. I watch the local newspaper daily so I can “put out fires” immediately if needed. I also look for potential letters to the editor topics.

*DaNita Carlson, Tobacco Free Coalition of Wood County, Wood County, WI,
Northwoods Coalition member*

Tips on how to write a press release:

- Draw interest of the target audience with a strong news angle such as making the story relevant through highlighting recent events if possible.
- Create a clear, concise headline that includes the name of the organization issuing the press release and describes the content of the news release.
- Use quotes from key community leaders or specialists in the topic being addressed.
- Use statistics to illustrate why the issue is a concern to the community.
- Use proper grammar and spelling.
- Write in third person; avoiding I, we, us, your, etc.
- Address who, what, when, where, why and how.
- Read the release aloud to see if it makes sense.
- Include the release date plus contact name and information when sending it to the media.
- Use bullet points sparingly.
- Use agency/organization letterhead.
- Mark the end of each page with “-more-“ and the final page with “###”.

*Adapted from Community Briefing Prevention Toolkit: Town Hall Meetings.
For more information visit: www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/townhall*

Sample Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

- **PSA for student/child volunteer**

Moms and Dads...there are lots of new dangers in the world today, and kids like me need you to keep us safe. Hello, this is ____ from _____. On (date & time) at (location) you can attend a Community Forum to learn about Internet predators. Kids like me are relying on people like you to keep us safe! To learn more, please call ____ at ____.

- **PSA for teen volunteer**

No one ever starts out using drugs intending to become a drug addict. Maybe you know someone who intended to try weed once, for “the experience” of it, but is now using regularly? Or maybe a friend has vowed to never use “hard drugs” like Meth or cocaine, but is getting drunk... a lot! Some teens are even using with things like cough syrup, thinking it will give them a “safe high”. Hello, this is ____ from _____. Wanna learn more? Join other concerned teens and adults at (location) on (date & time). Hope you can join us! For additional information, please contact ____ at ____.

- **PSA for parent volunteer**

Parents, would you like to know about the newest drug trends, so that you can protect your children? Hello, this is ____ from _____. Join me, and other concerned adults, at (location) on (date & time). A panel of local law enforcement and other professionals will share details of how to keep your family members safe. For additional information, please contact _____ at _____.

- **PSA for Plunge event**

The (coalition) in collaboration with ____ invites you to the (name of event) at (location) on (date & time). Come spend the day and learn about (the problem), its causes and consequences and how we can formulate solutions that protect our youth and improve our community. For more information on this event call ____ or e-mail _____. Together we can tackle underage drinking. Join us.

Meeting Planning Checklist

Convening the Planning Committee

Two-three months prior

- ☐ Convene a group of people to act as a planning committee for the meeting/event
- ☐ Develop an agenda for the planning committee meeting
- ☐ Gather contact information and determine the best way to communicate with the group
- ☐ Assign everyone specific tasks with timelines for completion
- ☐ Take notes

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Planning the Meeting/Event

Two months prior

- ☐ Define the purpose of the meeting/event
- ☐ Determine the appropriate type of meeting/event- Informational, Town Hall, FACTS, or World Café.
- ☐ Depending on type of meeting/event
 - Determine guest speaker or panel of speakers
 - Set time limits and develop parameters for guest speakers
 - Contact guest speaker(s) and panelists
 - Choose a facilitator or someone to lead the meeting
 - Develop meeting agenda
- ☐ Determine if there is an organization that could sponsor or co-sponsor the event
- ☐ Develop a budget (if there are funds available)
 - Determine if food will be provided (solicit donations if needed)
- ☐ Determine date and time for meeting/event that works for the majority of members
- ☐ Determine location that will accommodate needs of audience

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- ☐ Develop roles and responsibilities for members (greeters, clean up, etc.)
- ☐ Identify the key community leaders who need to attend
 - Develop an invitation list

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Publicity and Promotion of the Meeting/Event

One month prior

- ☐ Draft letters of invitation to key community leaders
 - Mail letters of invitation (make sure to include an RSVP if ordering food)
- ☐ Prepare press release
- ☐ Contact local media
- ☐ Prepare letter of invitation to the community
- ☐ Develop Public Service Announcements
- ☐ Develop flyers for distribution throughout the community

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Preparations for the Meeting/Event

Two-three weeks prior

- ☐ Order needed items
 - Food (if being provided)
 - Nametags, participant materials (brochures, folders, etc.)
 - Easel pads and markers
- ☐ Reserve/locate needed items
 - AV materials (laptop, LCD projector, screen, portable microphone, extension cords, etc.)

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Chapter 1 – Hosting a Community Meeting

One week prior

- ☐ Confirm arrangements
 - Finalize room set-up
 - Select table set-up to fit with type of meeting (theater style, tables in U-shape, small rounds, etc.)
 - Number/location of display tables,
 - Number/location for registration tables
 - Number/location of food/beverage tables
 - Meal count, equipment needs, etc.
- ☐ Organize participant packets (and materials for display tables, if being provided)
- ☐ Send out reminder emails (especially to those who volunteered to serve as greeters, assist with registration, help with set-up, etc.)

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At meeting/event

- ☐ Arrive early to check on room arrangements and adjust as needed.
- ☐ Set up Audio-visual equipment, check microphones (if needed)
- ☐ Enjoy!

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Immediately following the meeting/event

- ☐ Make sure to pack all audio-visual items (don't forget cords!)
- ☐ Send out appropriate thank yous.
 - If local paper allows, develop "Letter to the editor" that extends thank you to speakers and those who helped to organize or fund the meeting/event.

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