**Outreach and Events**

*Chapter Goals: After reading this chapter, you will be able to -*

* *Consider the purpose of your event and whether an event is aligned with your advocacy goals*
* *Provide some quality tools for planning and executing an event and conducting quality outreach before and after and event*

Part I - Introduction

Events can be exciting. They’re a great way to build connections, inform people about your work, and inspire others to get involved in your advocacy effort for school choice. While a well done event can be great for building a network of followers and for boosting excitement, they are also a substantial amount of work.

This chapter will help you consider if hosting an event is the right tactic for your advocacy effort. We will start by discussing the purpose and timing of an event. If you decide that an event will further your advocacy efforts, we also provide some guidance and tools for planning and executing a successful event. We will conclude this chapter by talking through how to do effective outreach and follow-up after an event.

The content in this chapter should be useful and relatable as you think about hosting an event for your advocacy effort.

Part II - Purpose is Key

It can be tempting to include an event in your advocacy effort. Events can garner attention and really boost excitement. *However, events aren’t a requirement of a successful advocacy effort. Many advocacy campaigns have achieved their goals without holding an event.*

This is why we are starting this chapter with purpose. **Deeply consider the purpose of the event that you want to hold**. Go back to those goals that you set for your advocacy efforts. Will holding an event help you achieve those goals? If the answer is no, that is 100% fine. *You can still manage a successful advocacy effort without an event*.

If you do think that an event will help you achieve your goals, then really dive deep into the purpose of the event. Would the purpose of the event be to inform people about your school choice issue? Would it be to bring people together? Would it be to form new relationships? Maybe it’s going to serve a few purposes.

As you are thinking about the purpose of your event, start thinking about the audience that you would like to attend. Some possible groups that you could target for your event include:

* Other parents
* Teachers, school leaders, school staff
* Members of the community
* Students
* Community leaders

Now that you’ve thought about alignment with your advocacy goals, the purpose of the event, and who you would like to attend, you can start building out a vision for the event. This could be something that you write out. It can be helpful to write this down so you can come back after the event and see if you met your vision.

Part III - Timing Matters

As you are planning the vision of your event, it’s important to consider timing. Timing can be deeply connected to audience or purpose. If your desired audience is parents, it can be advantageous to hold your event during back to school week or during parent teacher conferences. These are times when parents are more engaged with their child’s education.

Holding an event for parents during the summer might be harder. During the summer, many families are less connected to their school. Many people also leave town for the summer. Think about the audience of your event and think what type of event is best for this group of people. Or, identify times of the year that might be a challenge for this audience.

Timing can also be tied to the purpose of your event. If you are holding an event to inform community members about school choice issues, with the goal of taking action at the state level, you should make sure your event is before the start of the state legislative session. Most state legislatures are part-time, meaning they are only in session for a few months of the year.

If your event is focused on getting community members informed and ready to take action at the state level, it should happen before the legislative session starts. That way, the community will be ready to meet with leaders, testify, and flex their influence when the session starts.

If you hold your event during the legislative session, you might not have enough time to get your attendees prepared to act. Hosting your event in the middle of a recess would likely not be the best idea - lawmakers could not be in town.

Make sure the timing of your event is in alignment with both the audience and purpose of your advocacy effort. This will help ensure that your event is successful and supports your advocacy goals.

**Tips and Tricks**: **Be very careful when committing to a reoccuring event.** As you have probably already figured out from reading this chapter, planning and executing events is a ton of work. When you are committing to a recurring event, you will have to go through this rigorous planning and execution process multiple times. Additionally, it can be difficult for people to commit to attending a recurring event. As you plan more and more events, it can be difficult to find new speakers, repeatedly secure a venue for an event, and afford the cost of food and other necessitirs. Unless you have a team of people who are willing to support and divide the responsibilities of planning an event, we recommend focusing on one time events that achieve a specific goal.

**Activity**

Think about what a potential event for your advocacy campaign could look like. For your potential event:

* What would the goals be?
* How would those goals relate back to the goals of your overall advocacy campaign?
* Who would be the focus audience and why?
* When would the event take place?

Part IV - Planning and Execution

Planning is a critical component to any successful event. The day of an event can be extremely stressful. You will have to manage competing priorities and unexpected things always happen. With your planning, you should try to eliminate or limit the amount of work you will have to do during the event. That way you can enjoy your event and build connections with the people that you are engaging with. It’s difficult to form authentic relationships with people if you are worried about the food arriving on time.

We have built [this checklist](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1M9B6w7LQCZsb64s5FFyoRjz_Fy8ckp61HKqiQTTrBok/edit#gid=0) to help you plan and execute a stellar event. This checklist is just a start. You will likely find things to add to this checklist as you start planning your event. Remember - your goal should be to eliminate or limit the things that you have to do during the event. That way, you can concentrate on engaging your attendees.

As you are planning an event, think about the next step that you are going to ask attendees to take after attending. This could be taking a specific civic action like voting, attending a school board meeting, signing a petition, or volunteering. This could also be learning more about the school choice issue that you are discussing, or pledging to connect with more people and recruit them to become involved in your advocacy effort. Your next step should be clear and every attendee should know what it is leaving the event.

V - Outreach & Follow-Up

One critical component of any event is outreach. As soon as you have secured a date and confirmed some basic logistics, it can be helpful to send people a *Save the Date*. As the event gets closer, you want to continue to remind people about your event. You want to be clear about the logistics - where and when everything is happening. Additionally, you want to give attendees an initial outline of the agenda and a clear understanding of why they should attend.

You should be creative in your outreach for the event. Use multiple mediums for communicating about the event: social media, email, text messaging, and maybe physical flyers can be great tools. Again, think about your desired audience and think about the best way to reach them. Maybe, do some research. Ask some people who have confirmed that they will attend and ask them what is the best way for them to find out about events.

While outreach is essential to getting people to attend an event, it’s also critical in engaging people after. One goal of your event is likely to build and deepen relationships with people that you are looking to involve in your advocacy efforts. Strong outreach will be critical to forming these relationships.

After an event, you want to follow-up with people soon after. This could be over email. Or if you have a smaller group, you could contact people through text or phone. In your outreach after the event, you want to thank people for attending and then follow-up on next steps from the event. It’s likely that attendees will require a few reminders to successfully complete the next step.

At the end of your event, you will have a database of individuals that you can continue to engage about your advocacy effort. They already demonstrated enough interest in your school choice issue to attend an event. It’s likely that you engage them in further action to support your advocacy effort.

VI - Hosting a School Choice Event Guide

Check out our [Hosting a School Choice Event Guide](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1p1cjsKPoc5VekdRAt6FYVCfE0qScrMw8/view?usp=sharing) to find more information on the different types of school choice events that you can organize in your community. This guide will also take you through a series of helpful questions that you can ask to yourself as you are getting ready to plan your event. Answering these questions will only further ensure that your event is aligned with your campaign goals and that you have done the necessary pre-planning to pull off a successful event.

*This chapter hopefully got you to think about different considerations as you think about hosting an event in support of your advocacy effort. Remember, ask whether an event aligns with the goals of your advocacy effort? If it does, the purpose, audience, and timing of your event should be aligned with your advocacy campaign. The checklist for planning your event should help reduce stress and limit the number of things that you have to do during an event. Coming out of a successful event, you will be able to develop strong relationships with your attendees - you can help some of these attendees become advocacy leaders within your campaign.*