

# PARENT ENGAGEMENT

## Key Takeaways

- How to plan and host a school choice event
- Understanding your own personal and professional network
- Getting the most out of your engagements

## Hosting A School Choice Event

Hosting your own school choice events is a great way to engage more parents and grow your network. The type of event may vary greatly depending on what you hope to accomplish and whether or not you already have an established network. Some ideas for events include:

### Parent Informational Meeting

**where:** Coffee shop, someone's home

**why:** Share information/ answer questions

### Legislator Meet-and-Greet

**where:** Location near Statehouse

**why:** Opportunity for school choice parents and key lawmakers to meet and interact

### School Choice Fair

**where:** Large public space such as a church

**why:** Invite parents to learn more about all the options in their community

### Happy Hour Events

**where:** Bar or social gathering place

**why:** Opportunity for parents and other advocates to network

### Phone Banking

**where:** Conference room in a library, your office, someone's home

**why:** Organize parents to call key lawmakers to share their support for school choice

### Statehouse Visits

**where:** Statehouse

**why:** Organize parents to visit the statehouse and arrange for them to meet their local lawmakers to share support for school choice

### Rally

**where:** Any public location

**why:** Gather large group of parents and other supporters, share school choice successes, get media coverage

### Informational Web-Ex

**where:** Online

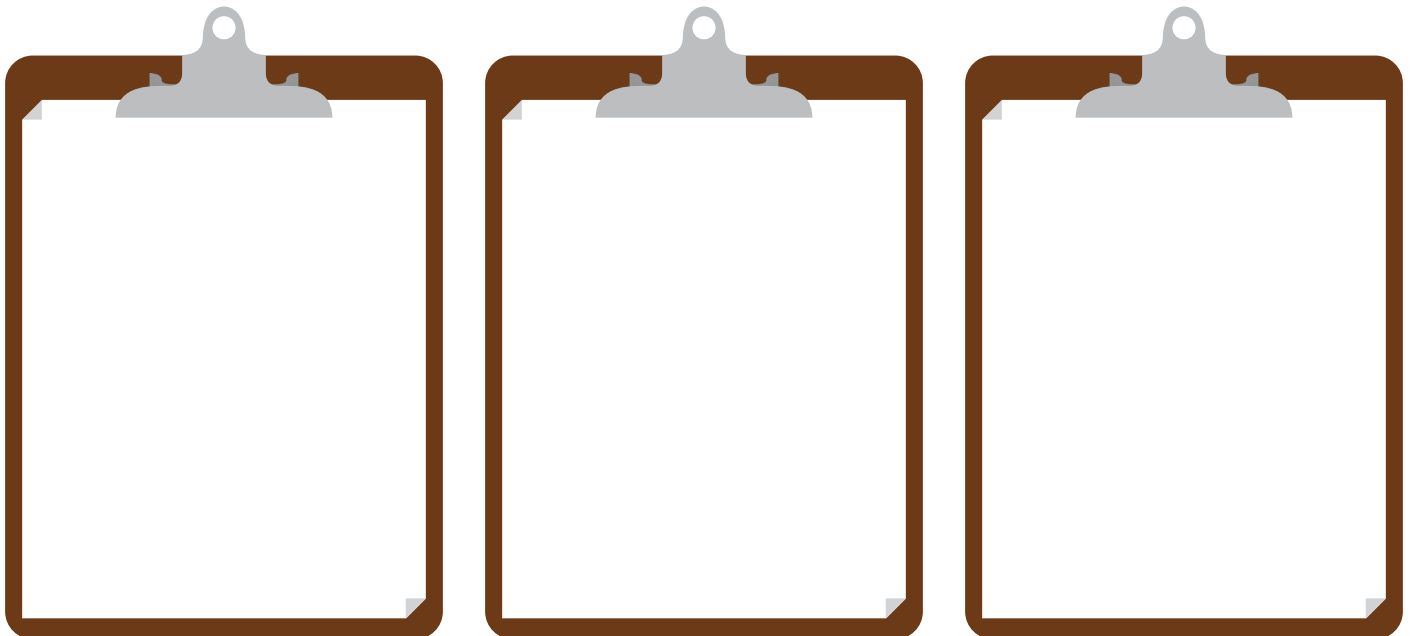
**why:** Opportunity to share information with people who may not be close geographically (ex: share information on a new bill with interested parents throughout the state)

## Questions to Ask as you Plan your Event

- What is the purpose of your event?
- Is there a budget for the event? (Even a small budget can help cover costs for things such as handouts and refreshments.)
- Who will be invited?
- Will there be an opportunity for earned media or social media?
- Decide ahead of time if you will be inviting media or sending them a press release about your event. Also designate one person to document the event for social media posting- either live or after the fact.
- How will you send invites and collect RSVPs? (Online platforms like SurveyMonkey make it easy to collect information from emailed invitations.)
- What will be the agenda for the event?
- Where will the event take place? (Consider free venues like public libraries or coffee shops. Free and easily accessible parking are also important.)
- How will you follow up with attendees?

## Take Action

Please use this space to outline 2-3 different events in your community.

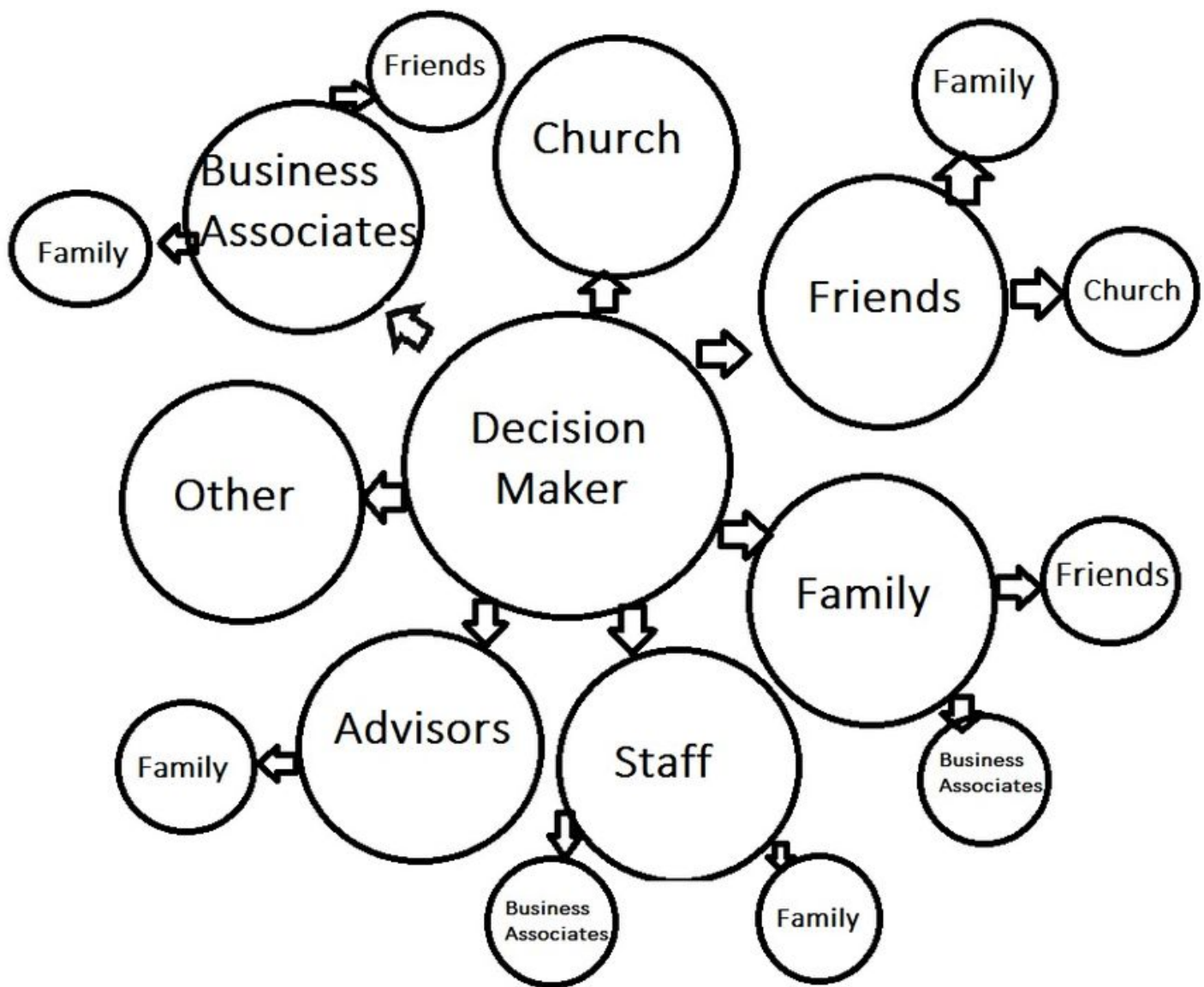
Three empty clipboard icons with brown frames and silver clips, arranged horizontally. Each clipboard has a white sheet of paper with a small folded corner at the bottom right.

# BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

## Key Takeaways

- Create a power map for your community
- Expand your coalition
- Develop an outreach plan for the next 3 months

In this section, we'll cover how to assess your connections, build a power map and figure out who's missing from your school choice landscape. You can use these power map templates to outline your personal and professional networks.



# Take Action

Please use this space to develop a list of 5-10 new people you will reach out to in the next three months. Who is missing from your network?

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# 11 Tips for Organizing Parents to Push for School Choice

By Virginia Walden Ford

My journey from being one mother fighting for my own child's education to leading thousands of mothers (and fathers and grandparents and supporters) pushing for more educational opportunities for all children has been incredible.

I have learned so much about the importance of hard work and dedication — but most importantly, I have learned that the most vital causes need an army of supporters to rally behind them. More educational opportunity for American children is not a political issue in need of “taking sides,” though there are some who would paint it in that light. Access to more educational options for kids from every neighborhood — from the poorest to most affluent — is something that ultimately benefits all children and the future of the country. I challenge anyone who thinks differently to speak with the hundreds of parents I've spoken with, face-to-face, in my 20+ years trying to improve school choice. Those parents don't care about the politics of school choice; they only want what is best for their children.

I learned a lot in organizing D.C. parents to fight for better educational opportunities for their children and I hear from many parents all over the country who are frustrated by the lack of options in their own neighborhoods, in their own states, and who want some guidance on where to even start when it comes to improving outcomes.

Below are some tips I share with others who are trying to organize school choice activism in their own cities and states.

- Go where the parents are — go to their neighborhoods, community centers, and churches. Do not ask them to come to you.
- Communicate with parents regularly through letters, newsletters, media, churches, civic organizations, etc.
- Talk regularly to community leaders on email and the phone: Local politicians, school administrators, tenant associations and more.
- Build strong coalitions to create strong support in the community.
- Treat parents with the utmost respect. Take time to listen and understand their problems as it relates to their children's educational future.
- Be honest with parents about why you are there and what you can do to help them.
- Remember that all parents have something they can add: some make speeches, some pass out flyers. Each has his or her own way of contributing.
- It's all about the follow up. If you present yourself as helping parents, be prepared to go the extra mile to make sure that parents have you with them as they complete the process of finding educational opportunities for their children.
- Make sure that parent meetings start on time, do not last too long, have childcare, refreshments and are structured to provide the best information possible in order to empower parents in attendance.
- Choose your battles. Stay away from debates that tend to confuse and frustrate parents who are hungry for solutions to educating their children. They ultimately have to make the final decision for their children and have a right to hear all sides. When you encounter opposition, keep your dignity and give parents valuable information that will be helpful to them in their search.
- Share your vision of where you are going and how those parents fit into that vision.

Laws are developed and passed by a select group of politicians – but do not discount the power of parents who team up for the better good. I know from experience that when parents raise their voices collectively, they can prevail.