



Organize Events

Organizing events, such as a rally or vigil, is a great way to gather like-minded people together, while raising enthusiasm and attracting attention for your cause.

Organize a Call-In Day

A call-in day is a great way to influence public policy and is very simple to plan and coordinate. A flood of calls can persuade a legislator to prompt stronger action for your cause.

- **Create a list of people willing to call ahead of time.** Contact them the day before the scheduled call-in day to remind them. Provide the callers with telephone numbers for the legislators. It can be useful to create a spreadsheet with this information and then e-mail to the callers.
- **With cell phones, people can make the call from anywhere.** While “tabling” at a centralized location, a group of volunteers can hand out a script to people, along with a cell phone.
- **If you are generating numerous calls, ask callers to leave a message with the receptionist.** Since you are trying to build a positive relationship with the staff, you don't want to overload the legislative aide with too many calls. A few callers can contact the aide to alert him or her to the messages left with the receptionist.
- **Create a message script so that each person delivers a consistent message.** E-mail the script to callers ahead of time with legislators' phone numbers.

Tips:

- Call your members of Congress at their Washington, D.C. office.
- Identify yourself and your affiliation (e.g. your school, AJWS and/or your hometown).
- Ask to speak with the member of Congress or the legislative aide that handles issues relevant to your cause. If neither person is available, leave a message with your name, address and phone number.
- Keep your message brief.
- Be sure to make a specific request of your representative.
- If you left a message the first time, try the person again a few days later.
- Be prepared to have background information on your issue available to send out if there are any questions. Check the AJWS website at www.ajws.org for information.

Organize a Petition Drive

Petitions are an easy and effective way to display your commitment to a cause. Aim for a minimum of 1,000 signatures before submitting the petition either online, via regular mail or in person. Every signature is significant and is literally counted by the addressee. Petitions place high priority on an issue, pressuring people of authority to act.

- **If submitting online,** manually add the signatures from the paper document onto the virtual petition.
- **If submitting by regular mail,** print out the online signatures to add to the count. Make a photocopy of the entire document before going to the post office. Consider sending through certified mail.

- **If submitting in person**, print out the online signatures to add to the count and make a photocopy of the entire document. Don't forget to make an appointment 3-4 weeks in advance!

Tips:

- Focus on the specific person(s) or institutions who you are addressing and concisely outline a specific request, which can be done through bullet points.
- At a centralized location, set up a table of laptops with instant access to an online version of the petition. Virtual petitions are quick, easy and will automatically add to the count. Check out websites like www.ipetitions.com or www.petitiononline.com to create an online version.
- Gather a group of volunteers and spread out to collect signatures. Think of places where lots of people circulate and/or split up in different neighborhoods.
- Send out a link to the online petition to all your friends and family via e-mail, Facebook or list-servs.
- Set a deadline to meet your signature goal a few days before presenting them.
- Include the names and addresses of signatories and print the petition statement on the top of every page.

Hold a Speak Out

Invite a speaker who is on the front lines of your cause. Bringing speakers to your community is a great way to educate others and to mobilize action. For example, reach out to those directly affected by the issue, academic experts and/or people who have worked in the field regarding your cause. Use this opportunity for letter writing or petition signing afterward. Provide flyers for future activities and events. Distribute evaluations at the end.

Tips:

- Start planning by setting clear goals and securing a speaker two to four months ahead of time.
- When inviting a speaker, explain exactly what you want him/her to discuss, what kind of audience to expect and the speaking time for the event.
- Clarify with the speaker the fees and expenses associated with his/her visit.
- Advertise with flyers, e-mails, phone calls and newspaper notices in the weeks leading up to the event.
- Follow up with speaker a few days before the scheduled event, providing logistical details about transportation and/or parking, meals and sleeping arrangements, if necessary.
- On the day of the event, have a pre-arranged committee greet and host your invited guest. Plan ahead and make sure all of the speaker's needs are met and that he/she feels welcomed.
- At the event, have a time-keeper display flashcards with warnings about the number of remaining minutes. Be sure to wrap up the event by thanking the speaker.
- Following the event, write a hand-written thank you letter and send immediately.

Additionally, members of Congress often help draw bigger crowds. Seek out a congressperson that has demonstrated a record of support for your cause and ask them to visit your community.

Plan a Rally or March

Catch people's attention! Host a rally in a central part of town. These are especially effective when held around important dates, such as an anniversary or in the days leading up to legislative vote. Invite speakers, play music, collect donations and pass out informational leaflets that include ways to get involved. Or plan a march through town, making stops at high traffic areas, busy commercial districts and government buildings. Make sure to investigate permit requirements. Post flyers, e-mail and call friends and family to urge them to attend and spread the word.

Tips:

- Invite a speaker with knowledge of or a direct connection to your issue.
- Secure the space for your rally three to four weeks in advance. If you plan on hosting in a public space, contact your local government immediately to learn how to acquire a city permit. There is usually a permit fee, so budget accordingly.
- Acquire and test out your sound-system and CD with music before the event. Make sure you will have an electrical outlet, if necessary. Plan ahead for any technological mishaps and bring a portable, battery-operated CD player just in case.
- Have a group of volunteers arrive an hour early to help set-up and guide people to the rally.
- Drape colorful banners near the podium and make large signs that are visible from the distance to attract passersby. Encourage people to come with their own creative posters.
- Use this opportunity for a petition drive.
- Following the event, make sure someone attends to the speaker while others stay to help break down the equipment and clean up.

Candlelight Vigil

Another option is to hold a vigil. Candlelight vigils are often powerful events that can have a great impact. Consider whether a vigil is appropriate for your cause. The vigil may commemorate those who have died or suffered violence. Include poems, readings, prayers and/or a symbolic count of victims. Invite other organizations and community leaders to present readings and lead prayers. The AJWS education department can help you choose appropriate texts and prayers.

House Party

Invite friends over for a fun, informative and action-packed evening. House parties are perfect when there is an immediate call to action, such as encouraging support for a specific cause or piece of legislation. Utilize the opportunity for a petition drive or letter writing campaign. Play music and provide snacks from the region or country associated with your cause. Be creative with activities by designing your own version of games, like Jeopardy, that will educate and motivate your audience to become more involved. Making an event fun will build attraction. Once you have a captive audience, you will be able to educate and inspire others to take action.

Film Screening

Include a short film (about twenty minutes) at your house party or hold a screening as a stand-alone event. Films also work well in collaboration with speakers. After previewing the film in advance, prepare a list of questions to guide a discussion after the event. Encourage donations at the door and provide a list of ways for your audience to get involved.

Photo Display

Gather and enlarge photos for a local exhibition. Get in touch with your local library or community center to set up an exhibit and consider having an opening reception. You can also set up a temporary exhibit outside, but be sure to investigate city permit requirements to use a public space. (See "Plan a Rally or March" section for instructions.) Think of places where lots of people congregate, such as concerts, parks or fairs. Visual aids can have a great impact and be a very valuable organizing tool. Don't forget to cite your sources!