



Holding an Strategic Event Tip Sheet

Introduction

If you plan your campaign right, you will be organizing a number of different events. They can include things like press conferences, educational events, or community fairs and town hall meetings. By sponsoring a strategic event, a smart growth group has an opportunity for a crystallizing occasion to focus the media, decision-makers, and the public on the issue of growth, transportation and solutions for their communities. A strategic event is a good time to recruit new coalition partners, potential allies, volunteers and to practice working with the public and the media. Learning how to do effective community outreach and community strategic events requires the same intellectual, planning and execution skills required in any important activity.

Defining the Purpose

The purpose of holding a strategic event is to:

- **Communicate** to existing coalition partners and interested parties what resources are available (staff, training, infrastructure, etc), provide them with educational materials, and prepare them for the work ahead or to begin a new coalition effort.
- **Identify** new contacts for smart growth and get them involved or work with them as allies.
- **Showcase** the work of the coalition and the coalition partners to the public and the media.
- **Relay** a broader message to the public, decision makers, educators and health professionals.
- **Practice** working with the community and conducting events.
- **Legitimize** yourself through the media and other communications methods.

Planning the Event

First, brainstorm with your partners on the goals for the event. Be sure they are specific, achievable and measurable. Have a planning meeting with the coalition partners to work out goals, roles, and responsibilities. Make a task sheet (see example below).

Example Goals:

- 75 people to attend the event.
- Build a contact/ mailing list of 500 people and organizations.
- Send out invitations to 500 contacts, including local officials.
- Have five coalition partners set-up displays to help with recruitment.

- Have the mayor and county commission chair speak at the event.
- Have a special outreach effort resulting in 10 faith leaders attending the event with contact made to at least 50 faith leaders.
- Table at three community events to recruit contacts.
- Place a story in the paper.
- Place a guest column.
- Set a meeting with the editor or editorial board of your local newspaper.
- Submit two letters to the editor.
- Conduct a pre-interview on the radio.
- Conduct a pre-interview on the television.
- Table display at two locations promoting the event.
- Post event outreach to media.
- Post event outreach to decision makers.

Example Materials

- Fact sheets
- Pamphlets
- Sign-on letter
- Copies of recent newspaper articles about the issue
- Posters
- Name tags
- Display
- Banners of organizations
- Sign-in sheet

After determining your goals, lay out a timeline for the event. Review this timeline with your coalition and assign people to each task. It is helpful to develop a “task sheet” at your planning meetings.

Example Task Sheet			
Task	Who	When	Completed (Y/N)
1. Locating and booking the room	Julie Jolly Helper	September 3 rd	
2. Personally inviting the City Council to attend	Vickie Volunteer	September 10 th	
3. Setting up table at the farmer’s market	Annie Assistant	September 15 th	

Sample Timeline

August 12th – Set a date for an organizing meeting with your core group. Prepare for this meeting by having a draft agenda and initial set of goals.

August 14th – Hold the organizing meeting; develop goals and a location for the event. When choosing the location of the event, remember to:

- Pick a location that is well known, accessible, open during the hours you plan to meet, has the necessary audio visual equipment (projectors, screens, marker board, etc.), and is free or only charges a minimal amount.
- Go visit the room BEFORE you send out the invitations. (The conference room coordinator may say it holds 75 people, but with chairs and extra equipment, it may only hold 50.)
- Have a sign-in sheet at the front door with name, address, phone number, and e-mail address for future meetings, volunteer opportunities, for follow-up.

August 22nd-24th – Develop a mailing list for invitations, get displays out, send information regarding the meeting to the newspaper, public TV and radio stations for their Community Events Calendar.

August 24th – Deadline for mailing invitations.

August 22nd-September 14th – Deliver presentations to interested groups. Tabling, passing out flyers, and phone calls should also be done continuously during these weeks.

September 1st - 14th – Call all people on the invitation list to remind them of the event and make sure they received the invitation. Resend it if necessary.

September 18th – Fax or deliver all news advisories and follow-up with a phone call to the TV, radio and newspaper.

September 25 – Go over your list of all materials needed for the event and who will make sure they are available. This includes:

- Sign-up sheet with blocked spaces for name, address, zip code, phone number and e-mail
- Who is going to make sure everyone signs in?
- Do you have all the copies of fact sheets, pamphlets or fliers you need?
- Who will bring the laptop computer, LCD or TV-VCR/DVD player (and video)?
- Who is bringing the posters and hanging them up? Do you have supplies?
- If a microphone is needed, who will check ahead of time to make sure it is working?

Details, details!

September 29th – THE EVENT!

September 30th – Debrief the event. How did it go? What was done well and what can be improved on for future events?

1st week of October – Send out thank you letters to partners with the next coalition meeting date; send thank you letters to the editor and speakers; hold a meeting to evaluate the success of the event and brainstorm list of positives and things to improve for next community event.

Getting the Word Out

Begin your recruitment by setting a goal for the number of people you would like to get to attend the event. If you want 75 people there, you have to do more than place it on the community events calendar and send out a mailing. It requires coalition building and recruitment from the

grassroots level. It requires using active recruitment techniques reinforced by passive recruitment efforts (i.e. media)

The Rule of Halves:
If 150 people commit to coming to the meeting, only (1/2) or 75 will actually attend.

Recruitment Strategies

- **Invitations** – The inexpensive way to use the mail is a postcard. You can buy them pre-stamped at the post office or you can print them out yourself. Five to ten percent of your attendance will result from a post card invitation.
- **Phone calls** – A more personal touch that is highly recommended because it produces a better turnout every time. Before you pick up the phone, brainstorm a list of all the organizations, community leaders, and legislators you want to invite. Send a postcard and then follow it up with a friendly reminder call. Remember to ask, “Can you make it?” If the answer is yes, then at the end of the call remind your guest again by saying, “I’ll see you on Wednesday at _____.”
- **Newspaper** – Free press is the best! Letters to the Editor, Community Events Calendars, and interviews with the health writer of the local newspaper are all great ways to ensure that everyone interested in smart group hears about the event.
- **Tabling** – Set up a table in a high traffic area. University student centers are great places, as are hospitals, post offices, libraries, etc. You will make face-to-face contact with individuals and your chances of getting them to the event dramatically increase.
- **Presentations** – Other organizations have meetings on a regular basis. Take this opportunity to do some education and tell them about smart growth and what your coalition is attempting to accomplish.
- **Flyers** – Produce flyers (to be posted all over town and passed out by teachers, faith community leaders, healthcare professionals, business owners, coaches, etc.)
- **Educational displays** – Posters in display windows with a flyer beneath them can be a very effective message and raise awareness.

Follow-Up

Contacts: Make sure you get names and phone numbers at the event and call or mail using this list after the meeting. If the person agreed to a specific task, make sure to mention it again after the meeting.

Media: If the media did not come to the event, don’t be discouraged, there may have been a fire in the area that day or some other important news story. Gather all the information from the meeting, a copy of the news release and a date for the next event/meeting and drop it by the newspaper or news station’s office. Try to speak to one of the reporters so they know who you are for future events and to answer questions they may have.