



Using House Parties for Fundraising

Want to raise money for your coalition/organization? Want to have fun while you do it? How about “killing two birds with one stone” and raising friends while you raise dollars? A fundraising house party may be the answer!

First things first

If you’ve ever planned a birthday party or housewarming, you can plan a house party. What exactly is a house party? It’s an event organized by someone who cares about the coalition/organization and is willing to be the party host. The host invites friends, neighbors, and family to a low-key gathering at his or her house to highlight the coalition/organization’s work and generate new advocates and monetary donations for the coalition/organization.

The house party is an easy, informal way to discuss the work of the coalition/organization. It provides a relaxed, friendly setting in which to learn about ways to support the work of the coalition/organization. Guests come to the party understanding that they’ll be asked for money, but there’s no “high pressure” selling. Guests listen to a brief overview of the coalition/organization and its work and are then asked to consider making a gift. That’s it! The rest of the evening is spent socializing and relaxing.

Organizing your house party

After a host has been identified and a date selected, the host should draw up a guest list. Invitees can be neighbors, professional colleagues, friends, and family – anyone he or she thinks would like to know more about the coalition/organization and might be willing to contribute.

You don’t need to have friends with “deep pockets” to host a house party! Remember that there are two goals--recruit new advocates (the only donation necessary being time) and raise money for our mission. Remember as well that the amount of money raised is not important—experience has found that most people who attend will make some contribution and that

Hosting a house party is fun. It gives you an excuse to invite and see people you know. We invited about 100 people but only about 10 or 12 showed up, so don’t be disappointed. I still run into neighbors who say they were sorry they couldn’t come, but they are very interested in the cause and admiring of my work with the Coalition/organization.

Plan your invite list early - keep jotting down names as they come to you. Consider sending a "save the date." Set the RSVP date fairly close to the event. I wrote a personal letter explaining my connection to the Coalition and why I was interested in tobacco control that was included in the invitation. You probably don't need to have much food or beverage - keep it simple.

I advise making a sign in sheet - to remember who came, to get to know new people, and to help in developing an activist network.

- Dr. Carole Allen, house party host, Tobacco Free Mass

attendees become committed advocates.

Prior to the party, you'll want to develop your pitch – a brief presentation you will make the night of the party that includes an explicit fundraising ask. It's important to talk a little about the history of the coalition/organization, its current priorities, and what it hopes to accomplish down the road. Give people an idea of where their money is going. Remember that people give money not because you have needs but because you meet needs – tell them how you are successful. The best introduction to coalition/organization staff making the pitch is some welcoming remarks by the host, a few words about why he/she is making a financial contribution to the coalition/organization, and a request to attendees to join him/her in making a contribution.



Hope to have ten to twenty people attend, depending on the size of the host's home. Try to have seating for everyone. Invite three times the number of people you're hoping will come. In addition to the host developing an invitation list, the coalition/organization staff can invite its grassroots advocates who live in the area – so long as the host is comfortable with doing so.

The coalition/organization should have ready-made templates for invitations. When a house party is scheduled, the particulars about the event (date, time, and location). It is suggested that invitations include both a start and end time – 2 hours is adequate. The invitation needs to make it clear that this is a party to raise money for the coalition/organization. The RSVP card should include a box that says "I cannot attend but please accept the enclosed donation" so that folks can send in a donation without attending the event. The coalition/organization prints and mails the invitations as well as coordinates RSVP's to reduce the burden of time on the host.

The night of the party

It might be helpful to put yourself in the shoes of your guests and think about how the evening should go. Make sure parking is obvious, houselights are on and the address is visible from the street. Have someone available to take guests' coats or have a coat rack handy. Place informational packets near the entrance of the house so that guests can take them when they arrive. Have food and drinks out and arranged in a way that encourages mingling (and avoids traffic jams). Make sure there's enough seating to accommodate your guests, and place trash cans in a conspicuous manner so that they won't have trouble disposing of their plates – and getting out their checkbooks. It is helpful to think about a sign-in sheet and nametags, unless you are certain that you will remember who came and that everyone attending knows one another.

Making the pitch

Your house party serves two purposes: first, to recruit grassroots advocates, and second, to build a donor base to help continue the coalition/organization's work.

The pitch should happen well enough into the house party that people have gotten a chance to relax and get to know each other but not so late that you risk folks leaving before the pitch. The host can welcome guests and share why and how they are involved with the coalition/organization. The host should state that they are making a financial contribution to the coalition/organization and invite guests to join him/her in doing so. The host can then introduce the coalition/organization staff to describe the work of the coalition/organization and talk about why financial contributions are so important to the coalition/organization's mission.



A few suggestions:

- Remember that the number one reason people donate money is because they were asked – it is absolutely essential that you explicitly ask guests to make a financial contribution that evening.
- Keep in mind that people give you money not because you have needs but because you are meeting needs. Brag about your work and be prepared to speak in a compelling way about the good work that the coalition/organization is accomplishing.
- Do not worry about making guests uncomfortable with your fundraising ask. The invitations make it very clear that this is a fundraising party and individuals who attend are expecting to be asked to write a check.
- It is recommended that donation forms be collected the evening of

the house party rather than giving guests the option of mailing it afterwards. Experience shows that many folks forget to do so. Again, remember that individuals come expecting to donate. Additionally, you can add a box to the donor form that says “I am unable to donate at this time” so that everyone returns a donor form whether they've written a check or not. Envelopes should be distributed so that guests can return donor forms with checks in a sealed envelope.

- If it is possible for your coalition/organization to accept donations by credit card, include that information on the donor form.
- Include information and a sign-up form for those who would like to get involved with the coalition/organization in other ways.

After the party:

Personalized, preferably hand-written thank you notes should be promptly sent to the party host and all party guests. Include tax acknowledgement forms as appropriate. Be sure to follow up with guests about opportunities for them to get involved in the coalition/organization in other ways!