

# Organizing a Called to the Common Good Public Event

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Pax Christi USA are encouraging Catholics committed to the common good to organize public events especially during the September-October congressional election campaigns. Several types of events are possible. Public events might include: **An Initiating Event** to announce your group's campaign around the theme of the common good; a **Community Forum** to explore how a key issue impacts your local community and how people can act on behalf of your position; a **Candidates' Forum** to explore the issues with candidates for the US House of Representatives, State offices; **Voter Registration Drives** at your parish or school; **Prayer Services** focused on your particular issue and addressing it through public prayer and ritual; **Discussion Groups** using resources you have found to be articulate on the issues; and more.

Each event has a different tone and is intended to seek the participation of different members of your community. What follows are some *specific organizing tips* to keep in mind when planning any of the above events.

## FOCUS

Choose a local focus or tie-in for your initial event. Connect the issue to something that has happened locally, or captured people's attention at the local level. What local angle can you tie-in to help people see how your issue is directly affecting their lives and this community? Example: Head Start Funding—*How many eligible children in our community are going unserved because Head Start is not fully funded?*

## RESEARCH

Identify the concrete ramifications of this issue within your community. Use concrete examples. Example: Head Start Funding—*How does lack of investment in early childhood development relate to local high school graduation rates and juvenile crime?*

## DOCUMENTATION

Provide credible, accurate, local information and statistics for your issue. Local colleges and universities often have centers that compile useful statistics/information on a wide variety of issues. The Chamber of Commerce, Mayor's Office, and the County Administrators of social programs can also provide information on the state of the community.

Provide documentation of your incumbent Representative's voting record or a candidate's position on your issue and other issues relevant to your community. Highlight inconsistencies between rhetorical support for your issue and actual voting or action on your issue. Challenge the positions, or lack thereof, of candidates seeking to represent your community.

Provide documentation of candidates' political contributors. Make the connection between contributions and the issues the Representative works on in appropriate committees or subcommittees on Congress or the connection between the contributions and the issues that a candidate addresses on the campaign trail. *Are major contributions coming from your community, or from corporate interests that have little investment or relation to your community?*

## PRESENTATION

Choose a site for your event that is impacted by current federal budget priorities and highlights the issue you are working on. Ideally the site should be one administered by a supporter of your issue. Work closely with the facility to assure their level of comfort and support for the event.

## PARTICIPATION

Invite the bishop (if a supporter) to preside and/or participate in the event. Invite 2-3 other Catholic community leaders, especially the administrator of the site where the event is happening. Reach out to other key Catholics in your community who have high visibility or a public profile and support your issue.

## PROGRAM

Plan a program that lasts no more than 30-45 minutes. Enlist the bishop or another high profile Catholic as presider/emcee and have 2-3 short presentations by other speakers. Stick to your focus issue and your efforts within your own community. Point to the documentation you have developed on the issue, your Representative, and other candidates. Provide information on how to join your effort.

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## Catholics Called to the Common Good

A PROJECT OF CATHOLICS IN ALLIANCE FOR THE COMMON GOOD AND PAX CHRISTI USA

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## **STRATEGY**

Don't think of the event as an isolated occurrence. The event should be part of an overall strategy to raise the issue within your community and particularly within the context of the elections (August-November). At the same time, think in terms of the long haul. Always ask: *How will what we do this week or this month develop relationships with others and nurture seeds for future actions in subsequent months?* Plan follow-up activities in advance and have information on these activities available at the event.

## **EVALUATION**

A very important step in the process is the evaluation to determine what was successful and what wasn't and how things could be improved. Accountability—did the network members fulfill their commitments in terms of tasks and the number of participants produced? What new opportunities can be identified as a result of this event's process? What new challenges? How has our campaign been enhanced? What areas of our work need to be improved and how can we do that?

*Staff members at Pax Christi USA and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good are available for help in developing events in your community. Contact our offices for assistance or questions.*