

Hosting a Letter-Writing Party

Now that decisionmakers receive a significant amount of communication online, a handwritten letter can really stand out. And when your local representative receives multiple handwritten letters all at once on the same topic, it sends a clear message about how important the issue is to the community. Not to mention that the act of bringing people together to take action offline, face-to-face, in the form of a letter-writing party can help create an increased level of excitement around issues important to you.

Here are six key strategies for hosting a letter-writing party that will get results.

1. Determine the Target and “Ask”

There are two ways to approach letter-writing parties. The first is to have a predefined recommendation or “ask” that you want a specific decisionmaker to pursue (e.g., “Vote yes for X bill,” “Publicly commit to supporting Y funding”). This is ideal when you have a group of individuals who are already engaged on the issue and agree with the ask.

The other option is to bring people together who are new to the issue and concerned about it, but may not know what or whom to ask. As the organizer, you should be clear from the start about the issue you want the group to focus on (e.g., drinking water, green space, renewable energy) so your invitees know in advance. The decisionmaker(s) and the ask don’t need to be clearly defined at the start; the invitees can discuss and decide as a group. But you should do enough research to have some ideas

to stimulate discussion, along with a general sense of who the key decisionmakers are.

2. Select a Location

Make a ballpark estimate of the size of your event and choose an appropriate venue. If it’s a smaller group, host the party at your home, another participant’s home, or a coffee shop. For larger events, look into community spaces. If you are a student, faculty member, or employee of a local college, utilize campus space. Try to find a venue that is centrally located, accessible by public transportation, or has ample parking.

Serving refreshments always acts as an incentive. You could suggest a potluck, have everyone chip in for pizza, or do coffee and donuts.

3. Invite Participants

Your invitees can come from all aspects of your life—work, school, faith, friends, family, neighbors—the options are unlimited (though be sure to keep your venue’s capacity in mind). If you have a core group of people that you often talk with about issues, start with them. See who wants to be involved and might even help you coordinate the activity.

Formulate a plan for reaching out to additional people. You can use social media, listservs, email, phone, or mail invitations. Creating a Facebook event can be a fun way to get the word out and ensure people have all the necessary information easily



Invite friends, colleagues, classmates, neighbors, and others you know to a letter-writing party on an issue you care about.

accessible. Include some basic information about the issue, target, and ask you plan to cover, as well as details about the venue and refreshments.

4. Prepare Supplies and Information

You'll want to provide attendees with some basic information about the issue and possible targets to get the party started. You can ask others to help jump-start the discussion and encourage those less familiar with the issue to ask questions. Prepare some talking points or basic scripts to share. You will need supplies on hand, such as paper and envelopes (or postcards), pens, and stamps, along with your targets' addresses. And make sure your refreshments are ready to serve.

5. Gather, Discuss, Write!

Generating ideas and then coming to consensus on what you would like the decisionmaker(s) to do (or not do) is a great way to get people ready to write, especially people who are new to the issue, because it gets them actively involved and feeling a sense of ownership over the outcome. Begin by providing an overview of what you know and ask others to give input. Discuss the options and vote on what you would like to decisionmaker to do.

When the group is ready to write, share talking points and script ideas. You want attendees to put the agreed-upon ask in their own words, using their personal stories/reasons for why this is important to them. To be sure the letters reach the decisionmaker at the same time, have one person volunteer to mail them all. And at the end of the party, be sure to give some information on follow-up and next steps.

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6. Follow Up

Staying in touch with participants after the event—via a Facebook group, email chain, listserv, or LinkedIn community—keeps people informed and engaged. Encourage attendees to share their reflections of the experience on social media. Share any news related to the issue, responses from the decisionmaker(s), and information about related events or groups. And you can always reconvene to discuss and act on new developments. In other words, keep the party going in one way or another!

Learn More

If you have any question as you develop your event, or to learn more about the Union of Concerned Scientists Science Network, email ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org.