



How to Organize Your House Party

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Definition

A **political house party** is a party (social event) held in a private home for the purpose of supporting a candidate, political party, or ballot measure, or to share information and opinions about an upcoming election or issue (local, state, or national).

Such events may be arranged as a dinner party, or with light or no refreshments in a more casual setting. In municipal politics, it is not uncommon for the candidate to appear at the event to explain his or her platform and to answer questions.

Increased voter contact is a common strategy for any candidate.

Supporters are often encouraged to organize political house parties by the organizers of the political campaign. Advantages include a stronger persuasive power than a lawn sign or political ad because some information is coming from trusted friends, there is time to convey a substantial amount of information, and the event is interactive. The primary disadvantage is that the house party will only "reach" a relatively small number of people, compared to the time and money required to have it. *Adapted from Wikipedia.*

Do's and Don'ts

House parties are an underutilized tactic for voter contact, especially around primaries and special elections. It is a good way to get a candidate to engage in their community quickly and authentically. Although this is an old-school technique, there are some new-school tactics (i.e. social media) to make it relevant in today's political toolbox

Do:

- A. Use your house parties as a means of voter contact (Hi, I'm Ben with Jenna Smith's campaign. We wanted to invite you to our house party on XXX. Jenna is the right candidate because XXX). Personal invites will get a higher response rate than a generic email or FaceBook post.
- B. Make phone calls to voters in advance to invite them to your house party. Allow for a 7-14-day advanced notice.
- C. Make sure you have the contact information for anyone that attends one of your house parties.
- D. Host multiple house parties throughout the course of the campaign, again with the goal of using the inviting process as a way of doing persuasion.

- E. Define a fundraising goal, if fundraising is part of the goal for the party. If fundraising is not a part of the goal, then make sure that's clear to the entire team in advance.
- F. Send out a postcard or a letter inviting people to your house party.
- G. Knock on doors in the neighborhood and invite people to the upcoming house party.
- H. Use social media tools or text people on your list and invite them individually.
- I. Create a calendar of when voter contact is going to happen around the house parties (i.e. when will the calls happen, when will canvassing happen, when will texts go out, etc.).
- J. Put a volunteer in charge of the house party and put a volunteer in charge of the voter contact around the house party (ideally, they would be 2 different people).
- K. Promote your house party across your social media channels – before and after the party.
- L. Take photos of your house party that you can put on the campaign's Facebook and Twitter account.
- M. Do send a "thank you" note (or post card) to every attendee. Hand-written notes are better than pre-printed. Many campaigns pre-print one side of the post card and then hand write a message on the other side.

Don't:

- A. Worry if people don't come. The goal is to use the party to let voters know you are working in the community and care about their needs.
- B. Expect an overwhelming number of people at your house party. The main goal is being able to do phone calls and voter contact before the party.
- C. Think of house parties as only fundraising events. They should largely be thought of as voter contact events, but feel free to include a fundraising ask at the party.
- D. As a campaign, don't spend a ton of money on a house party; water, coffee, a cheese platter, and/or cut and bake chocolate chip cookies are fine. Check with the host-they may want to spend or do more.
- E. After your house party: don't forget to follow up with the attendees, take photos, and send out posts on social media. You could even create a custom Facebook audience to send ads to that invite other to your next party, if you had additional budget.

Sample Schedule (Time: 60 – 120 minutes)

As People Come In:

Make sure your guests sign-in (name, street address, email, and phone number) so you know who they are and so you can send them candidate or issue-specific follow-up messages. It will also be important for monitoring how you are meeting your outreach and action goals. Informally introduce them to others.

Welcome from Host – 5 minutes

Introduce yourself and briefly share what inspired you to become involved with the campaign or issue. Your openness will help set the tone for the rest of the event. Explain

why you are hosting this house party, why you support a candidate, and why they will be the best person for the office. Reference why you are asking your guests to join you in taking action to elect a candidate or act on an issue.

Around the Room Introductions (Break the Ice) --10 minutes

Encourage your guests to introduce themselves and answer an easy “ice-breaker” question. See below for suggested ice-breaker questions. Pick only one. (Avoid asking people why they are attending-this tends to put people on the spot.) Keep this light and fun. The host or facilitator (campaign staffer) should go first to set an example.

Main Content or Discussion

If the **candidate** attends, this is when they make comments. Use your judgement concerning the amount of time.

If this is about an **issue**, a speaker(s) can present information for about 15-20. Attention spans are usually around 20 minutes.

Evening parties may have lower energy and call for a shorter time slot.

Assumption: Organizers will have copies of candidate literature so people can take them home. Issue parties can have fact sheets, so your guests can read and discuss.

Hand out **candidate/issue flyers** and discuss them. Talk about the differences between candidates on issues important to the people attending the party.

Action (Optional Strategies)

Taking Action--The Next Steps (At a Future Volunteer Event)

Ask all attendees to make a commitment to work a 2 to 3-hour shift: canvassing, registering voters, phone-banking, etc. Mention you will match their skills to campaign activities. Mention you will provide training. Mention you will organize a “buddy system” so they will have someone mentor them. Explain in detail what the role and activity includes.

Goal: Get as many people as possible to commit to one 2-hour shift over the following week – make the ask and lead by example.

Distribute action and resource (online and other sources) sheet as take away documents. These should explain how people can get connected to the campaign in the future.

Taking Action--The Next Steps (At the House Party)

Distribute action and Online Resources sheets. Describe each item in detail. Ask people to make 60 minutes of calls to undecided voters right now. Give call sheets and a

persuasion script to each person. Explain how to record notes on the call sheets. Distribute everyone evenly around the house. Come together as a group to reach out and find the votes we know we will need to win. Collect all persuasion scripts and call sheets (with notes).

Closing – 15 minutes

Thank your guests for their involvement and participation. If you have a door prize(s), distribute it (them)now.

Summarize upcoming events, strategies and/or actions.

Stress the importance of continued involvement.

Encourage your guests to host a **house party** of their own.

Another House Party!

Goal: Get 3 people to agree to host another house party or a smaller event-postcard writing party. This is where people (i.e. women-to-women or seniors to seniors) write postcards to undecided people about why they support your candidate or cause/issue.

Ice Breaker Questions

Remember keep it light and informal. Questions need to be easy to answer so people won't feel embarrassed when sharing an answer. It is okay for people to confirm an answer previously given. The host (or lead staff person/volunteer) should lead and set an example for others to follow.

1. What is your favorite song from your teenage years?
2. Who was your childhood actor/actress crush?
3. What is your favorite movie?
4. What is your favorite dessert?

If your meeting is focusing on conservation...

1. What is your favorite bird?
2. What is your favorite park?
3. What is your favorite season or "time of the year?"
4. What is your favorite outdoor activity?

Sources: Adapted from multiple campaigns, Wellstone Action materials, and the Campaign Workshop Blog.