

Hosting a Letter-Writing Party

Now that decisionmakers are receiving a significant amount of communication from online sources, a hand-written letter can really stand out and make an impression. And when your decisionmaker gets several handwritten correspondences all at once on the same topic, you send a clear message about how important the issue is to your community. Turning this action into a party offering an opportunity to build community and comradery among those who want to get involved.

1. Determine the target and ask. While some members of your party will want to write independent messages, we recommend that you have a pre-defined recommendation or ask that you want a specific decisionmaker to address. This gives your attendees tools to easily write an compelling letter, regardless of their familiarity with the issue to action. .

Regardless of how by-the-script or free form your attendees want to approach their letter, we recommend you frame the party around a specific issue you want to focus on (e.g., drinking water, green space, and renewable energy) so that attendees know the greater goal they are working towards. The decisionmaker and the ask don't need to be clearly defined, but as an organizer, it's best to have a general sense of who the key local decisionmakers are.

2. Select a location. Make a ballpark estimate of the size of your event and choose a venue that will accommodate all of your attendees. 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 local community spaces. If you are a student, faculty, or employee of a local college, utilize space on campus. Try to find a venue that is centrally located, accessible by public transportation, or has easy and ample parking. Refreshments are always a perk. Don't be shy to get creative. When people enjoy taking action, they're more likely to stay involved.

3. Invite participants. Your invitees can come from all aspects of your life—work, school, friends, family, neighbors—the options are unlimited (though be sure to keep your venue capacity in mind). If you have a core group of people that you talk about issues with, start with them. See who might want to be involved and coordinate with you. Formulate a plan for reaching out to additional people. You can use social media,

listservs, email, phone, or send invitations asking people to RSVP. Creating a Facebook event can be a fun way to get the word out and ensures that people have all of the information easily accessible. Include details about the venue and refreshments, as well some basic information about the issue, target, and ask.

4. Prepare supplies and sample language

You'll want to provide your attendees with some basic supplies to get the party started. Bring background information on the issue, target, and ask for those less familiar or to jumpstart discussion. Prepare some talking points for people to write their letter. (See the *Talking with Your Elected Officials* handout for constructing sample talking points.) Provide paper and envelopes (or postcards), pens, and stamps. Have the decisionmaker's address on hand. Make sure your refreshments are ready to go.

5. Gather. Discuss the issue, target, and ask. Write!

Coming to a consensus on what you would like the decision maker to do (or not do) gets people actively involved and feeling ownership and is a great way to kick off the event. Begin by providing an overview of what you know and ask others to give their input. Share talking points and script ideas. Discuss the options, vote on what you would like to decisionmaker to do, and start writing. To be sure that the letters are going out together, you should have one person volunteer to mail them all. At the end of the party, be sure to give some information on follow up and next steps.

6. Follow up

Staying in touch with the group after the event keeps people informed and engaged. Encourage attendees to share reflections of the experience on social media. Create a Facebook group, an email chain, a listserv, or a LinkedIn community. Share issue news, decisionmaker responses, information about related events or groups. Reconvene to discuss and act on issue updates. Keep the party going.

If you have any questions as you develop your event, or to learn more about the Science Network, email ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org.