

Organizing Around An Issue

Many changes we need in our community depend on public policy decisions. Political leaders make many of those changes and getting them to put the issue on their radar and make real progress on it takes work. Here are some guides to that work, and action steps for types of events that can help make that happen.

FRAMING YOUR “ASK”

Every strategy needs a focus. What is the objective? What is the ask to elected officials or political parties?

It's essential to be strategic about what policy change you want to see happen. Avoid the usual broad asks without specific actions and solutions and those that focus only on funding requests. Learn more about developing your “ask”.

There will always be competing priorities for governments, so identify what makes your organization or sector different and what strengths you bring to the table.

What's the issue or solution? What would you like to see addressed?

Why should elected officials care? What's the alignment with what they're focused on and can, or want, to make happen?

What solution are you proposing to support Ontarians and make communities stronger?

What's your value proposition? Also think about the overall value proposition of the Ontario nonprofit sector.

CONSIDER

Who is going to support your ask? Who may oppose your ask, and why?

If available, include the cost-benefit analysis of your solution, gathered from independent research. To get the data, check with academics in that field, a research organization, or a social planning council to see if they have supporting research.

RETHINK POLICING

Working together for community safety

MEET WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS OR THEIR STAFF



ASK

Ask in person, call, email, or send a letter to each local elected official briefly outlining your organization's work, your key messages, and your asks. Request a meeting to discuss these items. Elected officials often have staff dedicated to engaging with constituents on issues.



SCHEDULE

Follow up with a phone call or visit to the constituency office. Negotiate a date, time, and location for the meeting. Let the staff know how much time you would like and be prepared to shorten the session if need be.



PREPARE

Once the meeting is confirmed, put together a team to attend the meeting. The larger the team, the more organized you'll need to be at the meeting. It's helpful to have a mix of staff, board members and, if possible, beneficiaries of your service or activities who can provide personal stories of how key issues impact them and how solutions are supporting or will support people. Elected officials are sometimes more interested in hearing from the people who live in the area than paid staff of organizations. Create a quick facts binder of key points about the organization and your impact to use at all meetings.

As a group, fine-tune the points that you will raise (your asks), organize them into an agenda, and decide who will chair the session and who will speak to which item. The size of the group will guide how long individuals can speak. In general, keep the individual presentations to a maximum of **three minutes each**. More experienced members can help others to organize what they will say. Ask for a volunteer to write up the meeting notes when it's over so everyone has the results of the meeting on paper.



INFORM

Tell the staff who will attend the meeting.



MEET

Arrive on time and go in as a team.

Have the chair open the meeting, thank the elected official and briefly outline the purpose of the meeting and the agenda. All participants should introduce themselves. From there, the chair should manage the agenda, making way for the speaker for each item. The official or staff may ask questions of individual speakers and the chair should be able to subtly keep the agenda on track.

Be prepared to be flexible. The official may not have time or want to go through the full agenda. The chair should be able to cut to the chase so that the most important items are discussed. Finish by thanking the elected official and providing a contact person for further questions or information.

QUICK TIPS

Consider organizing as part of an existing network or team up with like-minded organizations.

For questions or more information contact: Ginelle.Skerritt@tngcs.org

HOST A FORUM OR TOWN HALL MEETING ON ISSUES



START EARLY

It can take time to get speakers and book elected officials, promote the event, secure a location, and find a moderator. There will also be lots of groups who will be vying for community attention, media, and elected officials' time. Keep in mind that media and public interest tends to increase when the issue is a big news item, so you may have a bigger audience if you are able to secure the event while the issue is still in the headlines.



COLLABORATE

Put together a team to organize the forum. Although one organization can organize the event, an existing community network, representatives from like-minded organizations, or like-minded individuals are often more effective to share tasks to be done. Learn from other local organizations that have experience with this type of event.



ROLES

Team members will:

- **Book speakers or facilitators.** You will want someone with expertise to provide information and answer questions on the issue.
- **Develop a key theme** for the event. This could be related to social policy issues, economic development, or other, broader issues. How will issues be presented and how will community members give their input on the issues and their effect? What can people take away as an action item or next step so they leave feeling empowered?
- **Develop a communications plan**, including community outreach and media relations.
- **Liaise with speakers** to negotiate the date, time and length of the event, their role, and how the event will proceed (e.g., order of speakers, maximum speaking time, managing a question & answer period).
- **Develop a budget** and plan for any expenses.
- **Invite media** to cover the event.
- **Find a location and organize logistics** (e.g., accessible venue, seating, stage or front of room set-up, podium, AV equipment, checking all logistics early on the day of the event).
- **Approve all event materials**, including media releases.
- **Maintain contact with speakers** and update them as the event develops. At the event, meet the speakers at the door and escort them to the stage or speaking area.

QUICK TIP

Assign a committee chair to help ensure that the event is well organized and well run.

HOST A FORUM OR TOWN HALL MEETING ON ISSUES



PREPARE

Designate specific team members who can act as media contacts and spokespeople at the event. This helps with clarity and consistent messaging. As part of their role, they will contact local media as soon as the date, time, and location are finalized. On behalf of the team, they will send out a media release the day before the event. On the day of the event, they will set up and staff a media table

AT THE EVENT

Ensure that issues are clear and well- explained for the audience. Share handouts if they are helpful. Make sure there are opportunities for you, community partners, and audience members to outline the impacts of the issue on the community. Be solutions-oriented and have a clear ask.

Give any elected officials who attend an opportunity to outline their position, answer questions, and talk about how they will respond to the issue.

For audience questions, consider asking people to write their questions on paper ahead of the Q & A portion of the event. Have a team member collect and sort through the questions before passing them on to the moderator. And consider online forums (Twitter chats and more) to gather questions and increase engagement. This will help keep the event on time and ensure that more questions get asked.

Stay on time. Start and end the event as scheduled.

ENGAGE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Share issues, stories of impact and voices of your community through social media. Amp up the social media channels your nonprofit already uses, and cross-promote with other organizations and groups. Create social media campaigns to share your messages creatively and consistently during and after election periods. Tag elected officials, and key organizations and people. And don't forget to include hashtags, ones you use for your organization or sector, ones you create for campaigns, and general hashtags to join bigger conversations (#ONpoli | #TOPoli and policy and advocacy hashtags).

Use images and videos as these are key to getting the best engagement.

Don't have a design budget? Here are some free tools to create your own visual assets:

- [Canva](#): for non-designers to create great social media cards, brochures, papers and more
- [Piktochart](#)
- [Pixton Comic Maker](#)
- [Powtoon animated video maker](#)

QUICK TIP

Strong moderators are crucial! Finding an experienced moderator that all parties will trust is absolutely essential to keeping the event on track in a fair and nonpartisan manner and to deal with the unexpected.

RETHINK POLICING

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If you intend to have a more formal part of the event (like, introducing the elected official to the crowd, presenting mementos such as children's art), let them know.

Assign board members, staff, or clients to meet the elected official on arrival. They should be able to give them a tour, introduce them to attendees, ensure they have food and drink if they choose, and make sure they get to their place.

ENGAGE THROUGH TRADITIONAL MEDIA

→ Pitching media stories

Follow journalists who cover stories and issues related to your mission and contact them with ideas for articles. Keep your pitch brief and look for a new angle you can provide.

→ Letters to the Editor or Op-Eds

These types of articles help raise awareness of key issues your organization is working on, and can get the attention of parties and candidates. While there is strong competition for space in larger media outlets, local media are often looking for good local content. Political parties set up media monitoring teams with a focus on local media.

→ Focus on making it local

→ Make it relevant and tie it to what's happening in the community, in the general news cycle, or to what's been published recently in that media outlet.

→ Present a different point of view than what's already being said.

→ Keep it concise

→ Use facts and figures and don't be afraid to use a **compelling story** to make your point.

→ What if it's not published?

Don't be discouraged. Even if your letter is not published, the more letters an editor receives on a given topic, the better the chances are that the news outlet will recognize public interest in that topic and cover it in some way. It can be helpful to have a group of supporters write their own letters and send them in.

Turn it into a blog post or eblast to share with your networks and communities (that's what Imagine Canada did).

→ Tips and tools

Writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper is easy and effective,

David Suzuki Foundation

Write an Op-Ed, Queen's University

I write letters to the editor because..., National Post

Lists of news outlets:

Community newspapers in Ontario

Ethnic press newspapers in Ontario

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