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# HOW TO HOST A HOUSE PARTY

A house party is essentially a scaled-down, more intimate version of a teach-in. Just like a teach-in, a house party is a chance to educate, organize, and hopefully raise some money for your campaign. The key difference is scale—instead of doing public outreach and striving to attract dozens or hundreds of people, a house party is geared toward your existing circle of friends, relatives and neighbors.

House parties played a key role at the beginning of the struggles against Jim Crow laws and the war in Vietnam. During those efforts, organizers held informal get-togethers in their homes during which they informed their friends and relatives about the injustice they were trying to end. This was a great way of spreading information, building energy, and raising money—and eventually the efforts percolated into a real movement. Today the house party remains a valuable way of reaching those you most want to connect with—the people closest to you.

A house party is one of the simplest ways to educate people about and fundraise for the work that you are doing. The essential idea is bring people together—old friends, new friends and friends of friends—to dialogue with them about your work in a cordial atmosphere.

House parties are a good venue to explain a complicated issue to many people at once, allowing them ask questions and get more information. It can also be a place for a group of people to meet someone famous or important, or someone who brings interesting information about the issue you and/or your group is working on. You or your selected speaker tells their story to an audience that is then moved to do something to support your cause—volunteer, write a letter to their elected representatives, or give money. The main goal of a house party is often to raise money for your campaign after educating people about why their support is so important.

Although all of us at some point have held house parties, it is useful to go over the obvious and not so obvious details about having a successful party.

## **There are five basic steps to putting on a house party:**

- Find the person who is willing to host the party at their house and take on other related responsibilities related to the event.
- Prepare the list of people to be invited.
- Design the invitation.
- Choreograph the event, particularly the pitch.
- Orchestrate the Pitch.
- Evaluate and follow up.

## **Find a Host**

The host of a house party has many important duties to fulfill, and they don't just include providing the house and some food. The host, with the help of co-organizers, invites those who they think might be interested in the issue(s) to be discussed. An ideal host is somebody who understands the issue(s) at hand, can easily discuss it, and is not afraid to ask their friends, or those present, for money.

## **Prepare the List of People to be Invited**

Once someone has volunteered to host the party, the organizers of the event help that person decide who is to be invited. In figuring out how many people to invite, keep the following factors in mind: As a rule of thumb, invite three times as many people as you want to attend. Begin by inviting the host's friends and neighbors. Don't forget the people who you know are interested in the issue. Focus on expanding your base of supporters—that way you increase your numbers... and your budget.

## **Design the Invitation**

An invitation does not have to be fancy and can be easily printed at a copy shop, so expenses should not really be an issue. If you have access to desktop publishing computer programs, attractive invitations can be produced without much difficulty or cost. The invite should reflect something about the host, the guest speaker, and/or the crowd. Also, don't forget to "hook" the guests by mentioning the issue(s) to be discussed.

Finally, remember to include the following: an indication that people will be asked for money. A line such as "Bring your questions and checkbook" or something similar is fine. Also offer people a way to contribute even if they can't come to the party—a reference like "I can't come, but enclosed is my donation" is suitable. Remember a RSVP to help prepare for the party, and directions on how to get to the house along with the host's telephone number.

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### **Choreograph for the Event**

Parties sometimes fail because of disorganization. Since the idea is to ask people for money, make the party easy—cater to your guests as much as possible without overdoing it. Do what you can to make it easy for them to find parking, find the house, find the bathroom, get to the food, relax, and have a good time. In other words, help them to help you. It is also a good idea to have a guestbook where guests can write down their contact information. This is useful in keeping track of supporters. Although it may sound obvious, remember that a party is a party—it supposed to be fun, so make it fun. Food, music and refreshments all contribute to creating a friendly atmosphere that will help inspire guests to contribute to your cause.

### **Orchestrate the Pitch**

Everything at the house party should be built around the pitch. Time the pitch about one hour into the party to make sure everyone is present when it happens. The host calls for everyone's attention, introduces himself or herself and welcomes everyone. If there is a presentation, the host introduces the presenter. After the presentation, the host should be the person to make the pitch. A pitch must be made. Don't be shy. It's one of the main reasons for having the house party to begin with.

Although some do not agree with the tactic, it is useful to station “decoys”—a few pre-selected people who agree to quickly contribute after the pitch is made. They break the ice and generally make people feel more comfortable about giving money by being the first to do so. Also, decide ahead of time *how* people can contribute. Choose beforehand whether people should place donations in a basket, or designate people to go around and collect the contributions.

It is very important to not hurry the pitch. Give people time to write checks, give cash, whatever. Don't just carry on quickly into the party—if the pitch person starts to party then everyone else will take their lead...and forget to contribute. Obviously, this is not a desired result.

### **Evaluate and Follow Up**

After a house party, evaluate what went well and what could have been done better. When doing this keep in mind the previous points, with special attention to the presentation and pitch. Write and send thank-yous to everyone who gave money. Add the guests' information to your or your organization's records for later use.