

Hosting a meet-and-greet for a political campaign

Summary

This guide details best practices for organizing a successful campaign event, emphasizing effective invitations, agenda preparation, timely guest reminders, and day-of engagement. It advises keeping candidate remarks brief, fostering guest interaction, and avoiding explicit references to fundraising due to legal considerations, while still providing subtle opportunities for contributions. After the event, gratitude is expressed through thank-you notes and attendee lists are shared for follow-up.

Steps:

Hosting a meet-and-greet can be an effective way to introduce a candidate to the community and generate support. Here are the key steps involved:

1. Invite the candidate

- Contact the candidate's campaign office to extend an invitation and propose several potential dates.
- Clearly communicate why you believe their presence at the event is important.
- Provide details about the expected number and type of attendees, such as neighbors, community leaders, and potential opinion leaders, to help the campaign assess the potential reach of the event.
- Explain which specific issues you would like the candidate to address at the event.

2. Choose the location

- Private homes are a popular choice, provided there is enough space to comfortably accommodate the guests.
- Consider alternative locations like community rooms, public spaces (e.g., coffee shops), or, with employer permission, an office.
- Consider locations that are convenient and easily accessible to the target audience.
- Important note: Meet-and-greets are most effective when kept to a reasonable size, allowing for genuine interaction and conversation.

3. Build your invitation list

- Include your friends, neighbors, and other individuals who might be interested in learning more about the candidate.
- Focus on people receptive to discussing policy and issues, rather than only those who align with a specific party affiliation.
- Aim to include opinion leaders, such as active community members and professionals (clergy, doctors, lawyers, etc.), who can influence others.
- Inviting double the number of desired guests is a good strategy to anticipate and account for potential no-shows.

4. Plan the refreshments

- Opt for simple and modest refreshments (e.g., coffee, snacks).
- In Arkansas, campaign laws discourage the use of extravagant incentives to draw attendees. Lavish spreads could be considered in-kind contributions and might be subject to reporting requirements and contribution limits.
- Consult the <<Link: Arkansas Secretary of State https://www.sos.arkansas.gov/uploads/rulesRegs/Arkansas%20Register/2005/aug_2005/153.00.05-002.pdf> Arkansas Secretary of State's rules regarding campaign finance and disclosure for specific details on in-kind contributions>.
- Avoid mentioning the refreshments in the invitation to prevent any appearance of providing an enticement.

5. Send out invitations

- Send invitations, including an RSVP request, at least three weeks in advance to allow attendees to plan their schedules.
- Consider using a combination of email, physical invitations, and phone calls to maximize outreach and responses.
- Simpler invitations tend to be more effective.

6. Prepare an agenda

- Develop an agenda that outlines the event's flow, including time for mingling, introductions, candidate remarks, and a question and answer session.
- Work with the campaign office to finalize the agenda and prepare an introduction for the candidate.

- Keep the candidate's remarks concise (10-15 minutes) and allocate sufficient time for questions and one-on-one conversations.
- Prepare some initial questions to stimulate the Q&A session.

7. Remind guests

- Send reminder calls or emails a few days before the event to minimize no-shows.

8. On the day of the event

- Provide name tags for everyone, and ensure the candidate has a chance to circulate and interact with all attendees.
- Encourage interaction and involvement from all guests to create a welcoming and engaging atmosphere.

9. Avoid calling it a "fundraiser"

- While fundraising might be part of the event, avoid explicitly referring to it as a fundraiser to avoid legal complications related to campaign finance laws in Arkansas.
- Focus on the purpose of the event which is to allow for discussion and questions, which helps attract more attendees who might be hesitant to attend a traditional fundraising event.
- The candidate can encourage contributions subtly by mentioning the campaign's website or making contribution envelopes available.

10. Thank attendees and helpers

- Send thank-you notes to everyone who helped organize and attend the event, including the candidate, campaign staff, and guests.
- Include a recap of the key issues discussed in your note to the candidate.
- Share a list of attendees with the campaign for potential follow-up.