

## REACH OUT TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Numbers make a difference, and legislators will be more inclined to vote your way if they feel there is a groundswell of support behind your position. You can create that wave through community education.

### **Network with Other Organizations**

Expand your group's reach by contacting other community organizations. Don't expect everyone to be interested in your issue. Look for both natural connections and unexpected partnerships. Coalitions of unlikely allies can be powerful, especially in convincing legislators that a wide variety of constituents share your concerns. Attend a meeting of the group you are interested in, explain your common interest, and suggest a joint activity. Don't be discouraged if one group is not interested — maybe an individual can suggest other partners. Keep the focus on working together. Building relationships takes time but can pay off in the long term.

### **Connect with the community**

Don't forget the variety of peace churches and faith groups across the United States. Also, many congregations of other faiths and denominations may be led to support peace causes, though theirs may not be considered a "peace church."

Start simple, asking churches or other faith groups if they'd be willing to make "Gun Violence Must End" signs available to their congregations, or even to display a sign outside their building. Many FAN constituents have connected with other religious groups on current issues.

### **Hold a House Party**

House parties are good opportunities to educate people who are interested in an issue but lack information. Invite friends, coworkers, members of local organizations, and anyone else who might be curious. Show an educational video or have a guest speaker, then hold a discussion afterward. Consider organizing a house party around a theme or holiday, such as Mother's Day or Human Rights Day (December 10). Provide snacks or plan a potluck.

Have an action for people to take afterward, such as writing to legislators. Also, get the names and contact information of people who want to get more involved. Send FAN the contact information of those who would like to receive email alerts or a free trial newsletter subscription.

### **Set Up a Table**

Concerts, rallies, festivals, holiday picnics, election events, and other high traffic areas can be great venues for this. A bright sign and friendly people can often generate new interest in an issue or organization. Greet your visitors and let them know what you have available. Resist the temptation to chat with friends behind the table. Consider using an ironing board for portability.

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*A Partnership for the Common Good*

Your table should include something eye-catching, a sign-up sheet to receive more information, handouts, and some on-the-spot action like a petition to sign or a postcard to send. Some groups have had success with signs like “Save the World on Your Coffee Break,” and coffee provided to all action-takers, or “Become an Armchair Activist” behind a comfy chair for people to sit and write letters.

## **Work with College Students and Faculty**

Colleges and universities are good places to gather resources and support. Work with faculty and student organizations to create an educational event. Most schools have funds to pay for speakers. School newspapers cover campus events and organizations. Some professors are willing to creatively involve their classes in grassroots actions or will open their class to an outside speaker.

When working with student organizations, show respect for their leadership and experience. Build partnerships with them. Offer to staff tables with them on campus, to find them speakers for events, or to pass along FAN materials and email list information. Bring students with your lobbying group when you meet with legislators.

## **Reach Out to High School Students**

High school students are often concerned about the world in which they live but feel they have no control over events. Reach out to church and community groups where there are natural connections. For example, international student groups and model UN clubs might do street theater on supporting the United Nations. Members of a church youth group who have volunteered at a soup kitchen might write letters to the editor or to their legislators requesting better funding for social services. Certain issues may be compatible with social studies classes, and some high schools are looking for ways to involve students in community projects. By bringing high schools into your network, you build not only support for your issue but also students’ skills for long-term change.

## **Use Libraries and Community Facilities**

Most people use their community facilities at least once a month, and many of these facilities have display cases or bulletin boards. While you probably will not be able to put up information about a particular piece of legislation, you may be able to educate people about the issues. Make a display about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Human Rights Day, December 10. Put up a display about the history of nuclear weapons and the international treaties to limit their use on Hiroshima Day, August 6. Have a hook like these commemorative days or a local resident’s having made a trip to a war-torn country. Include your group’s name and contact information so people can get more information and become involved.

## **Get Creative**

Imaginative displays and events catch people’s attention. Hands-on activities and those that involve diverse groups of people draw them in. Get children to help bag food to be donated to families in need. Invite church groups to construct prayer chains to decorate public spaces. Attend a town meeting or hearing dressed in a costume appropriate to the issue being discussed. Banners, props, puppets, and street theater are all good starting points.

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