



Step-by-Step Guide to: Organizing a Health Care Reform Forum

(Courtesy of Don Nguyen dhnpedurol@aol.com, pediatric urologist and Ohio State Director)

First step: Let your State or Regional Director (or Deputy Field Director) and info@drsforamerica.org know that you're considering organizing a forum so we can help you connect with all the resources you need to be successful!

A) **THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:**

Select 6-12 members of your community, hospital, or medical practice. These individuals are your “generals”. They may be colleagues in your practice, in your hospital, politically active residents/medical students, friends/community activists, local community leaders, church and civic leaders that can contribute a large source of supporters and followers, leaders of progressive groups.

Draft an email for Doctors for America to send to members in your area to find others who may be interested in organizing the event with you and send it to alice.chen@drsforamerica.org.

Start small, at a friendly and warm meeting place (ex: someone’s home, a coffee shop, local country club). A direct call or in person invitation to be on “An Organizing Committee for Health Care Reform” is always very attractive to any local civic leader or politician and very rarely turned down. You are more likely to be turned down by another doctor because of time constraints and limitation or political persuasion. Use your clout, as a physician, as a leader in your community, and your association with Doctors For America and any other Medical Organization.

B) **THE AGENDA:** The first meeting.

a) Introduction/Greetings: Around the table introduction – your name, title, why you are involved in the campaign, when you began to feel obligated to get involved, etc... Beware of some long introduction, but yours, as a physician, should be passionate and up close and personal.

The “Statement of the purpose of the meeting”: the goal is to set up an open Forum to “educate, inform, and motivate” participants to act on Health Care Reform. You are looking for ideas, support and help from the committee.

b) Selecting the panelists: (4-8 panelists for a 1.5-2 hr long forum)



3-5 physicians (colleagues, residents, medical directors, etc. that you feel connected to, and are for reform. The doctors' lounge is a good place to find them. Fields of expertise may be weighted as you try to identify the panelists. More on this later.)

1-2 Health care advocates (nurses, AARP, Organizing for America or Health Care for America Now staffers, MoveOn, pro-reform business leaders)

1 politician representative (the higher level, the better clout ex: Sen. Sherrod Brown or his State Director in Ohio, or State Representative)

1 policy expert (if available)

The members of the organizing committee can really help you in identifying some of these individuals due to their connections to the community leaders, to their circles of friends, to their grass roots community organizing connections.

c) The date and time: Obviously important. Weekdays are better than weekend, night time is better than day time, for obvious reasons (more people will attend on a weekday, easier to get media coverage). Avoid Wednesdays (church for some people) and Fridays (competition with high school sport events, the Opera or the Symphony, etc.). 6:30 or 7:00 start times are good for panelists to arrive, politicians to travel from neighboring towns, for the media to do their taping and editing in time for the 10:00 late night news. The date has to be set before the venue can be secured although you can start out with several open dates.

d) The Moderator of the Forum: Your choice. You can be the moderator and a panelist at the same time, but other options include celebrity announcers, dean of medical schools, etc. if you can find one. My recommendation is to keep it simple.

e) The Venue: The choices are plentiful, depending on the expected sizes of the crowd. Assign a "site manager" to be responsible for the securing, reservation, and site visit of the venue.

- 1) High School Auditoriums or Gymnasiums (capacity 100-200, fees can vary, but \$25-50)
- 2) Churches and church sanctuaries, mosques, synagogues, temples (usually free)
- 3) Local public venues (contact the city Commissioner or the Mayor's office for the list of these free town halls)
- 4) Local libraries (usually free)
- 5) Fire Station Meeting Halls (usually free)
- 6) Local Banquet Halls (usually more expensive and larger capacity 200-300)



- 7) Local Hotel Meeting Rooms (ex: your local Holiday Inn, more expensive and larger capacity)

f) The Equipment:

- 1) Audio-visual equipment: Computer laptops, power-point slide projector and screen if a presentation is planned. A PPT presentation with pro-reform data and information can be extremely powerful for lay people (contact mandy.krauthamer@drsforamerica.org for our latest set of slides). Slides can contain logo of DFA, contact info for the legislators, etc. during the discussion or Q&A's portion of the forum. And don't forget about a laser pointer.
- 2) Audio equipment: Wireless microphones (2), one for the Moderator, one for the panel. Most venues will have some form of equipment, but an economic rental unit (for karaoke parties) will do.
- 3) Long table with a nice table skirt, ice and water for the panelists are always nice. Names of the panelists are good for the media to identify the panelists and for the audience when they ask questions.
- 4) Background décor, like the American Flag is a nice touch.
- 5) Computer savvy volunteers to run the audio-visual equipment and the lighting system.
- 6) Table or tables near entrance for sign in sheets (names, emails, phone numbers, addresses, etc.). This is extremely important but sometimes ignored.
- 7) Question cards, pencils, exit flyers, etc.

g) The Security and Safety Issue:

Contact your local Police Department in advance and alert them that a Town Hall Meeting or Forum or Debate is going to happen at a certain venue. Inquire about local rules and regulations regarding removal or evacuation of individuals for unruly or disrupting behavior. This is highly recommended and purely pro-active. The local PD will send a patrol to the area as a precautionary measure. The venue may have security personnel who may be helpful.

h) Media coverage and Advertisement of the Event:

Contact our communications director, Megan Smith (megan.smith@drsforamerica.org) to alert the local television and print media outlets and Doctors for America members in your area. Advertisement is through email listings with the help of other advocacy organizations,



church and community organizations, and via local newspapers that will make such announcements for free. Flyers can also be distributed throughout the city and neighborhoods (barbershops, restaurants, fairgrounds, etc.). Assigning these specific tasks to volunteers is key for a successful and well-orchestrated event. Don't forget to invite local dignitaries, politicians, city council members, city commissioner, the mayor, etc.

- i) **Exit Strategy:** See more below. What people should take home at the end of the event. Prepare a sheet or half sheet to distribute to people when they leave. It should include contact information for local and key national legislators and talking points when people contact these legislators. OFA is a good source for such pamphlets or flyers, although talking points may differ from DFA points of view.

C) THE MAIN EVENT:

The most important part of the Forum is the event format:

1) The Introduction:

Recognize local dignitaries, politicians (incumbent and running for re-election) in the audience.

Special thank you to the local church or community leaders who may be hosting the event and to your organizing committee. At this time, consider an announcement about civility and respect for one another during the debate.

2) Main Presentation (Power-point presentation) – 15 min: Highlight the current broken Health Care System and why it needs to be reformed. I guarantee you a standing ovation from the audience once the truth, data, and statistics are presented about the misdeeds from the insurance companies. An alternative is your speech on health care reform if you don't want or don't know how to put a power point presentation together.

3) Panelist presentation – 5 min. for each panelist (they tend to go overtime) Each panelist is next introduced by the moderator (the brief bio of each panelist had been previously submitted to you and you may want to add or subtract based on your Google search. Some panelists tend to be very modest and I can find more interesting facts on Google to say about them.) followed by panelist's presentation.



The presentation can address a wide variety of topics dealing with health care reform based on the individual's area of expertise, allowing some minimal overlapping.

Areas that need highlighting:

- Personal doctors' experience or stories of patients with or without care
- Doctors who are on the front line dealing with insurance horror stories
- Doctors with background in Public Health Policies trying to address the issue of failed safety nets
- Residents to discuss about why they want to go into primary care etc..
- Doctors in leadership roles to address the issue of shortage of physicians
- Local politicians/city officials to address the economics of the health care and their impacts on the city
- Politicians or policy experts to address the nuts and bolts of the different health care bills
- Others

4) Testimonials by patients – 1-2 min. each.

In person preferably or if not possible, the testimonial can be read by another person. This is when the local docs, community activists, OFA staffers can really help identifying some of these individuals. OFA has a list of cases that you can contact in your area to invite to present their stories. The more examples there are, the better. I call this portion of the event "Shock and Awe". Careful review of the testimonial ahead of time to ensure brevity and clarity is highly recommended.

Areas to highlight:

- Pre-existing condition denial
- Working or working poor that cannot afford insurance coverage
- Cases of "rescission", policies that are revoked when patients become sick
- Cases of business "purging" by the insurance companies
- Cases of failure of charity care
- Cases of bankruptcy due to medical disaster despite having coverage
- Cases of "intermittent coverage"

8) Q&A's:

The most dreaded part of any Town Hall Meeting or "Bring it on, Tea Baggery", depending on the format and control you have of the event. The key is to NOT allow any member of the audience to have the microphone! Throughout the evening, questions are written on 2X5 cards and collected, tabulated, and categorized (2-3 volunteers for this task). The moderator then reads these questions to the panelists who then answer them. This format has not resulted in any of the shouting and screaming scenes that we all have become accustomed to seeing in the earlier part of



the debate on Health Care Reform. The moderator reserves the right to read any question he or she should choose, and not read them if the questions are found to be redundant and non-contributory to the debate. Moreover, the panelists can gang up on answering the questions, making the answers even stronger and better in this format. If this is the format to be used, consider making several announcements throughout the evening reminding the audience to fill out their cards with questions. Alternately, cards can be selected randomly. Open microphone formats can also be used, but with caution, and you know what can potentially happen.

C) CLOSING REMARKS:

What can people do to help pass Health Care Reform Legislation?

Who should the people contact, call, email, or write?

A power point slide at the end of the forum with all the above information is a good idea, but an exit flyer is even a better one.

Final thank you for all the participants, dignitaries, people that took the time on their busy schedule to attend the event etc.

Music (patriotic songs): America The Beautiful and This Land Is Your Land are proven to motivate people better than without music!

Be ready for interviews with the local media outlets. Some media outlets want to interview during the event to make the deadline for editing purposes. Therefore, plan to have media contact people in the back of the room that are not on the panel for such request.

Have volunteers ready to hand out exit flyers to people and especially those who leave early.

Fired up, ready to go.

The Audacity of Health Care for All