

Ten Steps to Organising a Community Forum on Microbicides

Holding a community forum in your area is a great first step in getting involved in the Global Campaign for Microbicides as an endorser, partner, or site. If well organised, a community forum can bring together potential supporters from various constituencies, educate them about the status of microbicide research and why additional investment is needed, and invite them to join the Global Campaign. It may also allow them to attract local media coverage to further spread the message.

Keep in mind, the Global Campaign secretariat is readily available to help you implement these steps and can provide technical assistance in your region. Ask for assistance at info@global-campaign.org.

1. Decide **which organisational partners are co-hosting** the Forum. You may want to include HIV/AIDS, women's health, family planning and/or public health organisations, as each can invite people from its own constituencies and contact lists -- allowing you to maximise potential attendance at the Forum. You may also want to think about involving interested groups outside of the regular NGO circles such as faith-based groups active in HIV/AIDS, student groups, professional groups, etc.
2. Representatives from each co-hosting organisation should meet together to **decide the date, time and location** of the Forum. This should be determined by the customs of the communities you are hoping to attract. Do people prefer to come to morning, afternoon or evening meetings? If you are looking to attract a largely professional audience, can you offer it as a training with continuing education credits attached? If a grass-roots community event is more your style, would a morning, afternoon, evening or weekend event be most appropriate?
3. Then you need to **decide on a programme**. The Global Campaign can help you line up expert speakers (researchers, public policy experts, etc.) in the field. It's often helpful to present a combined programme of local and national people -- such as one speaker to give an overview of microbicide research and advocacy and another who is doing microbicide research locally, to talk about what's happening in your area. You may also want providers and/or consumers on the programme to talk about how access to microbicides would help in your community's fight against HIV and other STIs.
4. **Figure out your costs** including: location rental (if any), photocopying of the flyers and handouts, refreshments, etc. Speakers for your Forum can be lined up at no cost through consultation with the Campaign.
5. **Reserve the location** and make sure to request enough time to allow you to get the room set up without rushing. Again, consider local norms in selecting your location. People are generally more comfortable coming to a place where other community meetings are held, where parking and/or public transportation are easily accessible and where they know their way around.
6. **Make a flyer**. Someone at one of the co-hosting organisations needs to draft a flyer and circulate it to the other organisers for review before finalisation. The Global Campaign Information Officer or Regional Coordinator can send you sample flyers used by other Campaign Sites. Samples are also available on our web site (www.global-campaign.org). The flyer should include:
 - name of the forum (ideas for catchy titles available on request)
 - date and time

- location (and brief info. on parking and/or public transport if appropriate)
 - names of the co-hosting organisations or groups
 - names and affiliations of the speakers (this should be confirmed with all speakers in advance. If confirmation is impossible, list the speaker as "invited")
 - will refreshments be served? If so, how substantial? (e.g. indicate if you will be serving "light refreshments", continental breakfast, lunch, pizza, etc.)
 - mention that the event is free and open to the public or to whatever selected community is your target audience (e.g. "open to all health care professionals" or "open to all university students, faculty and staff", etc.)
 - if you are able to provide continuing education credits, be sure to mention that
 - do attendees need to RSVP? If so, to whom and by what date?
7. **Publicise the event** to attract your audience. Ideally, this should start about a month before the event - and really needs to start at least two weeks in advance. Some effective ways to do this are by:
- posting flyers where they will be seen by your target audience
 - leaving stacks of flyers where there is a lot of foot traffic by your target audience
 - making sure each co-host distributes flyers to its staff, volunteers, clients, and board members
 - enclosing flyers in any mailings that co-hosting organisations are doing
 - sending flyers (with a personal note asking them to attend) to media sources. Be sure to include selected reporters from your mainstream newspapers, radio and TV stations and local magazines as well as representatives of whatever gay and lesbian news, women's press and university press outlets exist in your community
 - sending written PSAs (public service announcements) to your local radio and TV stations with a letter asking them to air them. Global Campaign staff can provide samples and technical assistance on how to do this
 - sending "community calendar" announcements to your local newspapers, after first contacting them to find out their guidelines for submissions of such announcements
 - posting it on the web pages of each co-hosting organisation that has one
 - sending announcements out through local listservs and other networks you belong to
8. **Line up your handouts.** Again, suggestions and master copies of appropriate handouts are available through the Global Campaign and on our web site at www.global-campaign.org/download.htm
9. **Solicit media coverage** of the event. The easiest way to do this is to follow up on the press contacts described above with personal phone calls. Two weeks before the event, send each member of the press you're inviting a flyer and a note of invitation. Then, one week in advance, call each one to confirm that they received the invitation and talk about why you think this event would be of interest to their readers, listeners or viewers. Mention why your organisation is involved in this issue and why the people you serve need access to microbicides.
- Ask if there's anything you can do to help them cover the story. Some types of assistance you might offer include: setting up an interview with the forum speakers, connecting the reporter with someone (a client, volunteer or colleague) who is willing to talk "on the record" about why she/he thinks access to microbicides is important, or providing additional background information (briefing sheets, handouts, etc.) about the issue. Then make a reminder call the day before the event to find out if they plan to attend and to ask, again, if there's anything you can do to help them in covering the story.

10. **Set up a contact list for follow-up action.** One of the benefits of holding a Community Forum is that it's an easy way to ask people, at a time when their interest in the issue has been stimulated, to join your local Campaign Coalition's contact list. This is a database of people who have agreed to take action in response to coalition requests. When you receive one of these Global Campaign updates or action requests, or when other microbicide-related events are happening locally that may be of interest, you can use your contact list database or mailing list to get the word out locally.

To do this, however, you have to set up some kind of electronic database, e-mail distribution list or a paper mailing/phone list in which to store the names, addresses and contact numbers of people who want to be on your contact list. It's best if one of the co-hosting organisations can accept responsibility for setting up and maintaining this list and if you decide in advance who is going to coordinate use of it.

The Campaign provides a Contact List sign-up form and it's a good idea to distribute this at the Forum - asking interested people to complete it and turn it in on the spot. You can adapt the Campaign's form by adding the name and contact information of your local Contact List coordinator to the bottom of it. Then you can distribute this "localised" Contact List recruitment form at the Forum and elsewhere, as needed.

GCM is a diverse network of advocates and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working to expand HIV prevention options and encourage ethical research that involves civil society.

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