

How to Run a Forum with MTA Members

This guide outlines the steps for creating successful political organizing forums with your fellow MTA members. Managing forums is a process that can be broken down into basic steps designed to optimize the potential for a successful and useful forum or event.

Forum planning is affected (both positively and negatively) by extenuating circumstances. But if certain tasks are completed before, during and after your event, the success rate is significantly increased.

WHY HOLD A FORUM?

Forums are a great place to share ideas, network and create solidarity among our members. MTA members understand the political issues that are important to educators. It is vital that as many members as possible are engaged in strategizing how to further a pro-public education agenda. Depending on the purpose, a forum may be held with just MTA members, or with members and other community residents and elected officials.

A successful forum can have an impact on local issues as well as statewide campaigns by informing and inspiring our activist members and developing new ones. Our influence is spread organically since so many MTA members attend party conventions, belong to civic committees, contact state legislators about issues and volunteer on campaigns.

Key Points:

- Members become engaged when they feel they are a part of something.
- Meetings build a sense of community by giving educators a chance to discuss what is important to them and their colleagues.
- Meetings influence elected officials when groups of educators (5-10 or more) speak about what is important to them.
- Meetings provide an opportunity to plan action items, such as calling a legislator's office or drafting letters to the editor.

CROWD BUILDING

A forum is not a forum if no one shows up. Therefore, the most important part of forum management is getting people to attend. This is known as crowd building. Getting people to turn out starts with deciding the best **date/time/location** for the event.

Date

- **Forum with an elected official**
 - You need to wait for the elected official's office to give you a date before you can decide the time and location.
- **Forum with educators**
 - You decide the date and get to work.
- **Time needed for crowd building**
 - No matter what type of meeting you are having, give yourself at least two weeks to crowd build.

Time

- The time of your meeting should almost always depend on one factor: the best time of day to get the most people to your meeting.
- Educators get out of school around 3 p.m., so it is best to gather them before they go home. Meetings that begin between 3 and 4 p.m. are the most successful. Be sure to plan for travel time as well.

Location

- The best place to meet is where you can fit the biggest crowd. Community centers, libraries, locations at which legislators hold office hours and quiet restaurants are all good places to hold meetings.

DEFINING YOUR FORUM'S PURPOSE

Organizing a forum means that you are asking people for their time. People want to know where they are going and why.

- State the purpose of your meeting. What does it intend to accomplish?
- Clearly define the issue or action around which you are organizing your meeting.

Example: In June 2015, the Joint Committee on Education is scheduled to hear an MTA priority bill, "An Act relative to a three-year moratorium on high-stakes testing and PARCC."

Sample E-mail: The e-mail invitation should read like this:

RE: Discuss Testing with Rep. Day

Hi, Team – We have secured a meeting with Representative Mike Day in Winchester to talk about public education and high-stakes testing. The meeting info is as follows:

Discuss Testing and Issues with Rep. Day

Thursday, June 4, 4 p.m.

Winchester Library, Meeting Room 101

Light refreshments will be served.

Come out to hear from Rep. Day and to let him know how testing, or any other important issues, affect you as an educator.

If you'd like to attend, please let me know. For more information, e-mail me at this address or give me a call at 617-921-8693.

Paul

PUBLICIZING YOUR FORUM

Now you have your date, time and location. A state representative is attending your forum. You have clearly defined your meeting purpose. Now you must publicize your meeting to the right people.

This can be done in many ways:

- Targeted phone calls
- Targeted e-mails
- A broader e-mail from the MTA
- Telling local presidents, field reps, MTA Board members, your friends, community activists and other people interested in public education about your meeting.
- Group-text members in the local who have signed up for text messaging.
- Face-to-face conversations.
- Invite people via Facebook Event (or similar program) and set up an RSVP tool.

Crowd Building Timeline

Remember: You need at least two weeks to build a crowd.

Days 1-3

- Receive or create a date and spread the word with an initial e-mail to your PALs, team members and colleagues.

Days 3-7

- Identify “grasstops” educators: those who know a lot of people and can bring them to your meeting.
- Begin calling a list of members who are politically active — this list is provided by MTA’s Grassroots Campaigns Division.

Days 7-10

- Begin making a list of RSVPs that includes names and personal e-mail addresses.
- Continue to let a wide range of members know about this meeting through calls, e-mails and asking people for help.

Days 10-14

- Remind your RSVPs about the meeting, ask them to invite other educators to attend the event, and reach out to another, smaller list of members.

MAKING A PLAN AND AGENDA

Your meeting logistics are locked down. You know what time your elected officials are arriving. You have a good idea that 30 to 40 educators are attending your meeting. Now you need a plan and an agenda.

First, map out a plan for your meeting. It’s even helpful to write it down, estimating the time for each part of your meeting, and keeping in mind that this is just an estimation. You do this not to follow your schedule but to know when you are not following it.

Sample plan:

Educator Forum with Representative Mike Day

1/22/18, Winchester, MA

- (4:00-4:02) Introduction
- (4:02-4:05) Welcome from President X
- (4:05- 4:08) Brief remarks from an educator
- (4:08-4:20) Rep. Day gives remarks
- (4:20-4:45) Q&A with Rep. Day
- (4:45-5:00) Open discussion and planning
- (5:00-5:20) Action planning
- (5:20-5:45) Closing

Now, take your plan and create an agenda that you can spread publicly.

Sample agenda:

Agenda – 1/22/18

Introductions/Welcome

Remarks from educators

Remarks from Rep. Mike Day

Q&A/Discussion

Action planning

Closing

CHECKLIST

1. Establish a meeting date, time and location.
2. If inviting a legislator, get a date from her or him.
3. Clearly define the purpose of your meeting.
4. Publicize your meeting.
5. Make a plan for your meeting.
6. Create an agenda you can spread widely.
7. Remind RSVPs about your meeting 48 hours before it begins.
8. Have a sign-in sheet at your meeting.
9. Thank attendees and elected officials for coming out.
10. Send your sign-in sheet and a brief summary of the meeting to the meeting organizer.