

# Community Forum Planning Guide

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Organizing a community forum does not have to be difficult, but there are necessary decisions and tasks that make it successful:

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## **:: I. CONVENE A MEETING TO BEGIN PLANNING**

Establishing a working group to organize the community forum will make it easier and more successful. The working group can come from existing coalitions and affiliates of national organizations working on this issue. Consider including uninsured individuals or a family covered by the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), consumer advocates, business people, teachers or other school officials, labor organizations, health care professionals, health insurance companies, religious leaders, and diverse ethnic communities.

Members of the working group:

- > Help identify and secure a venue
- > Help engage elected officials and leaders from business, labor, health care and religious communities and identify media spokespersons
- > Encourage their own members to attend and participate
- > Publicize the community forum through their communication channels as well as in the community
- > Ask their public relations staff to help engage local media in the community forum
- > Help secure in-kind and other donations

Once the working group has been established, consider forming subcommittees to limit the amount of effort required by any individual or group. Suggested subcommittees include:

- **Site Logistics Subcommittee.** This subcommittee would be responsible for booking a community forum venue, preparing signage and banners, ordering refreshments and equipment, arranging for audio/visual equipmenting and tending to other details that ensure a successful event.
- **Media Subcommittee.** This subcommittee would attract television, radio and print media to the community forum and construct clear “takeaway” messages for participants and news coverage. Any working group member with strong media contacts and/or message strategy experience should be a part of this committee. For more information, go to the “Reach Out to the Media” section of this guide.
- **Speaker Selection Subcommittee.** This subcommittee would identify, invite and prepare speakers and a moderator.
- **Real World Stories Subcommittee.** This subcommittee would work to identify spokespersons, including families who are covered by SCHIP, individuals, small business owners who can’t afford coverage for their employees, and teachers or health care providers working on the front lines to share their stories at the community forum.
- **Audience-Building Subcommittee.** This subcommittee would identify the type of participants to be recruited to attend the community forum, extend invitations and ensure that the room is full on the day of the forum.
- **Fundraising Subcommittee.** This subcommittee would be responsible for securing any needed funds, donations or in-kind contributions.

A sample task list and timeline are included in the Appendix to help your working group get started.

## ❖❖ II. PICK A TIME, DATE AND PLACE

Things to consider include:

- **Day vs. night:** When are participants most likely to come? Before work begins? At lunchtime? At night? Are there rush hour traffic times to avoid?
- **Weekend vs. weekday:** Are participants more likely to attend on a Saturday or Sunday than a weekday? For example, are civic meetings traditionally scheduled on Saturday in your community?
- **Day of the week:** Are there days of the week that you need to avoid because they are traditionally reserved for certain civic, organizational or faith meetings?
- **Site selection:** Is the location easily accessible via public transportation? Is there parking nearby? Is it in an area that most participants will be familiar with? Is the location “neutral” or does it suggest “ownership” by a specific group or stakeholder in this issue?
- **Media coverage:** Is the location convenient to local media? Will the date and time interfere with newspaper or television news deadlines?

- **Register your event:** Register as an event planner at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org), where you can enter your event information, have your event appear on the main event calendar, invite people to the event by e-mail and set up a personalized Web page for your event.

### ∴ III. DESIGN THE AGENDA

Ensuring that all Americans, especially children, have access to affordable, reliable health care coverage is an important goal for our country. Because we are a diverse nation and communities may have some things in common and some unique characteristics, discussions about how to reach this goal can differ depending upon where we live and work. Therefore, a community forum might include a local, state and/or national focus and can include discussion of a variety of ways to improve access to affordable and reliable health care coverage.

#### CHOOSE A FOCUS FOR THE DISCUSSION

Solving this problem could necessitate action at the federal, state and local levels. In some cases, policies to expand coverage have implications on both the federal and state levels. You might decide to focus on all of these levels or just one:

- **Federal focus:** Some coverage strategies, such as Medicaid, SCHIP and Medicare, require federal enactment. In addition, there has been discussion about making changes to existing federal programs that will have implications for who is covered and the level of coverage.
- **State focus:** Each state has its own policies and regulations that can influence how coverage can be designed and delivered. In some states, there are policy and other state-level barriers that need to be addressed.
- **Community focus:** Cities and counties around the country are developing strategies to expand coverage and health care access at the local level. Community forums that focus on what can be done locally also need to consider whether there are state or federal policies or regulations that help or hinder positive action.

Visit the **Facts & Research** section of [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org) to find legislative proposals on the national level, as well as the strategies being employed on the state level.

#### CHOOSE OPTIONS TO DISCUSS

When our nation's leaders are concerned and want to solve a complex problem, such as access to health care coverage, it is common for a number of approaches to be proposed. It is unlikely that any one approach will provide access to reliable and affordable health care coverage for everyone. It is more likely that a variety of solutions in combination will be required to reach that goal.

Strategies being discussed include options that people might not be aware of, some that have been tried and have a "track record," and others that have been proposed but not yet tried. For more information on these options, go to [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org) to download "Health Care Coverage in America: Understanding the Issues and Proposed Solutions" and the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this guide.

## DETERMINE DESIRED OUTCOMES FOR THE MEETING

Suggested outcomes are:

- Informing elected and other leaders about how the community feels about the issue
- Media coverage so that the public becomes aware of the issues being discussed
- Convening stakeholders and beginning to find common ground toward solutions

These outcomes will guide the selection of speakers, issues to be discussed, the type of audience to invite and what to do after the community forum occurs.

## DEVELOP AN AGENDA

These are the four main components:

**1. Understanding the problem.** Set the stage for discussing solutions by first briefly outlining the problem to be addressed (e.g., who is uninsured in your community or state, including employment status, family status, age, ethnicity; how many are uninsured; what resources are currently available to provide health care to the uninsured). Information outlining these problems can be found at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).

**2. Strategies to address it.** There are many potential remedies that have been proposed nationally, and there may be others under discussion in your state or community. It is unlikely that any one approach will be sufficient. The purpose of the community forum is to have an open discussion of the strengths and shortcomings of a variety of approaches. Consider including:

- Approaches that are being considered nationally and locally
- Approaches that have received media or other attention locally
- Approaches with strong support in your community
- A mix of approaches, including those that expand current coverage programs, offer tax incentives and provide health care to the uninsured

The number of approaches you include depends in part upon the length of your community forum. Allot about 20 minutes for each, including five minutes for a presentation and 15 minutes for a discussion guided by questions you provide.

Fact sheets on the uninsured to use as handouts (“SCHIP: Overview,” “SCHIP: It Works” and “Medicaid and Uninsured Children”) are available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).

**3. Discussion of pros and cons of strategies.** Open discussion is the heart of a community forum. It is important to allow participants to express their opinions while keeping to the topic and time allotted. An experienced moderator and prepared discussion questions will be needed. Sample questions to guide the discussion of any potential solution include:

- Does this proposal provide health care coverage for individuals without health insurance? How many? Who (e.g. children, modest income adults, older adults under 65)?
- Does this proposal ensure continuity of coverage? Access to affordable coverage?

- > Will anyone lose coverage under this proposal?
- > Does this proposal reduce health care costs for employers? Individuals? Federal or state governments? If so, will these costs shift to another group?
- > What are the benefits and shortcomings of this approach?
- > What will it take to make it happen?
- > How much will it cost?

**4. Closing.** This is an opportunity for a speaker or sponsor to provide a wrap-up and encourage participants to continue to be involved in addressing this issue.

The following materials are available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org):

- > Information cards that describe how individuals can get involved
- > Bookmarks that direct parents to call the toll-free 1-877-KIDS-NOW national hotline to find out more about low-cost and free health care coverage

A template community forum agenda is included in the Appendix.

## **:: IV. SELECT AND INVITE SPEAKERS AND A MODERATOR**

### **CHOOSING SPEAKERS**

In general, speakers will present information to inform the discussion and will have a point of view. The moderator will remain neutral and ensure that the discussion is fair, focused and on time.

Speakers will help determine the level of media interest, community involvement and success of the meeting and should be chosen carefully. High-profile opinion leaders and stakeholders in the community not only give the meeting credibility, but they are often the “change agents” who play a significant role in guiding state and local policy. Therefore, consider inviting speakers who need to hear directly from the community to take its pulse on these issues. Presentations by speakers are important but should not consume so much time that participants do not have an opportunity to discuss the proposals presented. Therefore, limit the number of speakers and give them clear guidance about their roles and time limits.

There are many stakeholders interested in the issue of health care coverage and affordability and each offers a unique perspective on how to solve the problem. Business, labor, provider, insurer, consumer and faith communities are important stakeholders in this issue and often have specific ideas about how to cover more Americans or make health care coverage more affordable. Policy experts at universities and think tanks should also be considered.

When inviting a speaker, make expectations for the session and the speaker clear. For example, tell them how long to speak, the topic to cover and how to cover it (e.g., present both sides of the issue, discuss its potential impact on improving coverage, talk about current status, provide other information that will help inform a lively discussion).

## ENSURE A BALANCED PRESENTATION

By law, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation cannot lobby in support of or in opposition to any specific legislation on a national or local level, nor can it promote any political candidate. As such, events sponsored by the Foundation must be ideologically and politically balanced, and cannot serve as platforms for politicians or legislative agendas.

Once speakers are confirmed, brief them in advance of the meeting. Hold a conference call, send a memo or have an in-person meeting to share background information on the forum and the agenda, provide instructions for their presentation, introduce the moderator and share with them any materials that will be distributed at the event. This also helps answer their questions and clear up any issues before the community forum takes place.

As speakers are selected, keep in mind that there are a variety of perspectives on this issue and it may not be possible to represent all of them within the time limits of the meeting. **A balance of perspectives is critical.**

If there are groups or individuals who would like to present a point of view but there is not sufficient time to include them, there are other ways to allow them to share their views. The purpose of the community forum is to engage in a discussion between the speakers and the audience. Encourage groups who want to share their ideas to participate in the meeting by asking questions from the audience and commenting on speakers' ideas.

## LOCATING INDIVIDUALS TO TELL PERSONAL STORIES

It is important to put a human face on the issue. You can add an important personal element to the community forum by including an uninsured individual who has suffered as a result of their insurance status, a family that has benefited from SCHIP or Medicaid coverage, a small business owner who can't afford to provide coverage for their employees because it has become too expensive, or a physician or nurse who witnesses the health consequences when individuals who are uninsured delay getting care. Stories from real people illustrate what it means to be uninsured and the impact increased health care costs have on families and businesses. These stories will inform the speakers and the audience about the struggles people in your community face every day.

There are a number of ways to find people willing to share their story:

- Reach out to health care advocates and faith leaders.
- Contact the local chamber of commerce, small business development center or local business association to find business owners who would be willing to discuss their struggle to provide coverage to their employees or how increased health care costs have changed the way they do business.
- Local hospitals, community clinics or provider organizations may be able to help you find providers willing to relate stories about caring for patients who do not have coverage.

It is important that the story adds emotion to the event but does not confuse the discussion or diffuse the need to find solutions. The following are guidelines for identifying appropriate and compelling stories:

- A simple story about an “everyday” person will appeal to a broad audience. The public is more likely to identify with someone who works hard, plays by the rules, but has suffered from being uninsured or unable to provide insurance to employees.
- Note the tone of the conversation when interviewing a potential speaker. If the person seems to be angry or accusatory toward a particular interest, their story might not be objective and should not be highlighted.
- If the spokesperson was able to pay the full cost of their medical bills or had the means to purchase insurance but chose not to do so, theirs may not be the right story to tell.

In talking with potential uninsured speakers, check to see if they are eligible for free or low-cost health care or coverage and are aware of it. Resource guides for every state and a guide titled “Working With and Selecting Families to Speak With the Media” are available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).

### **CHOOSING A MODERATOR**

The moderator’s job is to remain neutral and ensure that the discussion is fair, focused and on time. This requires skill and preparation. Other attributes to look for include:

- A respected and trusted civic or other leader in the community, since the moderator will be “in charge” of the meeting
- A recognizable individual whose participation will help attract media coverage
- An individual who does not hold strong, known views on the issue of health care coverage, which could create perceptions of partiality among participants.

One option might be the dean of a local journalism school. Also consider inviting a local reporter from public television or public radio to serve as a neutral moderator. Their participation may help ensure media coverage from their station.

### **PREPARING THE MODERATOR**

As with speakers, the moderator must understand the desired outcomes for the community forum, the agenda and their pivotal role in making the community forum a success. The moderator should be willing to:

- Talk with meeting organizers and speakers prior to the meeting
- Read all background materials provided
- Speak with the media about why the meeting is important
- Be willing to take a strong, impartial leadership role

Sharing the draft agenda with the moderator is a good idea. Seasoned moderators often have insights about how to structure an agenda to ensure that the meeting runs smoothly.

## GUIDELINES

Moderator Do's & Don'ts:

- **Do** familiarize yourself with the speakers and prepare or use prepared questions
- **Do** work with the meeting organizers to make sure speakers understand the “ground rules” in advance (e.g., offer balanced presentations, describe solutions, treat other speakers and participants with courtesy and respect even when you disagree)
- **Do** review facts on the issue and key talking points in preparation for the meeting
- **Do** ensure that speakers keep their comments within the time allotted
- **Do** ensure that the discussion focuses on both the pros and cons of each proposal, allow all viewpoints to be heard, and discourage interrupting
- **Do** remain objective and impartial by not taking a position supporting one particular solution to the problem
- **Do** avoid jargon and technical language and help explain complicated concepts in simple terms
- **Do** be polite and attentive to both the speakers and the audience and encourage others to be courteous
- **Do** control the discussion
- **Do** end the meeting on time
- **Do not** take a position supporting one particular solution that a speaker advocates
- **Do not** emphasize that organizations and/or individuals disagree on the solution(s)
- **Do not** let the discussion escalate into yelling or an argument
- **Do not** let one speaker, organization or audience member dominate the discussion

## ❖ V. CONNECT TO THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN; ORDER MATERIALS

There are free materials available to help promote local activities, including customizable posters and stickers. Providing free *Cover the Uninsured* materials at local events helps to brand these events as part of the broad and diverse nationwide campaign. **It is important that you order materials early to ensure that they arrive in time and in the quantities you need.**

## **:: VI. DECIDE WHO SHOULD ATTEND; PROMOTE ATTENDANCE**

The number and type of audience participants is a critical factor. Getting the right people—and enough people—to a meeting is sometimes a difficult task.

### **TYPES OF AUDIENCES**

The make-up of the audience will determine the kind of discussion that occurs. Types of audience include:

- Representatives of organizations interested in the issue
- Formal and informal community opinion leaders
- Representatives of diverse sectors—business and labor, health and health care, insurers, consumer advocates, large and small employers, educators, and faith leadership
- People who reflect the composition of the community (e.g. ethnicity, age, geographic home, type of employment)
- Self-identified concerned citizens

**A robust discussion seeking common ground on which to build progress toward solutions requires an audience with diverse views. Be aware that if most participants represent one point of view, the discussion is likely to advocate for a particular solution rather than address the potential of various options.**

### **WAYS TO INVITE THE AUDIENCE**

Examples of ways to invite individuals to participate include:

- Asking involved organizations to send a specified number of representatives (See the list of national supporting organizations at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org))
- Asking interested organizations, faith communities, businesses and others to promote the meeting via their newsletters, meetings and listservs
- Posting or distributing fliers at well-traveled locations, including stores, houses of worship and public libraries

You may choose to use one or all of these methods.

### **FOLLOW UP TO ENSURE ATTENDANCE**

It is very important to make sure that people show up at the community forum. Plan for an audience about one-third larger than the size of the meeting room so that you have a full house.

Asking individuals to RSVP will help gauge interest but does not ensure that they will show up. Use your attendance work group volunteers to contact individuals and organizations days before the community forum and remind them to come. Consider a back up plan for identifying participants if it appears that attendance will be low.

## INFORM THE AUDIENCE ABOUT THEIR PARTICIPATION

A community forum requires audience participation, and attendees need to understand what is expected of them. They need to know:

- **The scope of the problem.** Download and distribute fact sheets at the meeting. If possible, assemble a few facts that “bring it home,” such as who and how many people are uninsured in your state or community. Fact sheets and state profiles are available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).
- **Proposed approaches to improving access to affordable and reliable health care coverage.** Speakers may be able to provide this information for you to hand out at the meeting.
- **How they can participate in the meeting.** The moderator or another speaker should tell the audience at the onset how they can ask questions (e.g., from the floor or by writing questions on cards), how long they can speak, and how long the discussion periods will be.
- **What they can do after the meeting.** The *Cover the Uninsured* information card lists suggested ways to get involved and is free to order at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org). Meeting organizers might have other ideas to suggest.

**Note:** Decide how to report to organizers who and how many people attended the community forum and how to contact participants at a later date. Encourage the audience to sign in and provide contact information when they come to the meeting.

## :: VII. REACH OUT TO THE MEDIA

Community forums will engage national and community leaders in constructive, balanced discussions of proposals to reduce health care costs and cover more Americans. A key to the success of this effort will be generating significant media coverage. The attendance of elected officials, diverse perspectives offered by stakeholders, and stories from small business owners or uninsured individuals can be packaged as an appealing story for the media. For specific tips on reaching out to the media, please go to [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).

### KEY MESSAGES

Go to [www.CoverTheUninsured.org/messages](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org/messages) to see the latest campaign messages and updates.

### STEPS TO GETTING MEDIA COVERAGE FOR THE COMMUNITY FORUM

Develop a Press List

- Include newspaper, television and radio reporters who cover metro news, government, health care and business. Invite columnists from local papers. Contact the press secretaries of any elected officials who will be participating in the community forum and the public relations staff of stakeholder organizations involved in planning for help in refining the press list and pitching the event.

## GET THE COMMUNITY FORUM ON REPORTERS' AND THE COMMUNITY'S CALENDAR

- Promote the event by sending information to television, radio and newspaper community calendars. Include a short description of the event; the location, date and time; and contact information. One week prior to the event fax or e-mail reporters a media advisory that describes who will participate, where and when it is and contact information. A template community calendar listing is available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).
- Get the community forum on the appropriate Associated Press (AP) daybook. AP distributes the daybook through its wire service to journalists in a state or community. Newsroom managers, assignment editors and reporters from media outlets check the daybook for important events. A state by state listing of AP bureaus can be found at [www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact.html](http://www.ap.org/pages/contact/contact.html). Fax or e-mail a copy of the media advisory to the appropriate bureau.

## PITCH THE EVENT TO REPORTERS

- Develop a news hook (e.g., high-profile participants discussing an issue important to the community and the fact that the community forum is part of a nationwide series of discussions on the issue of health care coverage and affordability).
- Supplement the news hook with important information that can help reporters tell the story.
  - Underscore the significance of the issue for the community by using state data and/or research
  - Prepare spokespersons who are willing to discuss the issue with reporters
  - Offer reporters the opportunity to talk to uninsured individuals or other individuals telling their stories at the meeting
- Call reporters the week prior to the event. Encourage them to come and cover the story and consider setting up advance interviews for spokespersons to set the stage for the community forum.

## DEVELOP MEDIA MATERIALS

A press kit will help reporters understand the issue and the purpose of the community forum and give you an opportunity to make the case for why this is an important story to cover.

The press kit should include:

- Agenda
- Biographies of speakers and moderator
- Press release—A template press release can be found at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org). Ask a speaker for a quote to use in the press release. Distribute the press release to all reporters on your list the morning of the event.
- Fact sheets about the issue—Fact sheets about health care coverage are available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org). Supplement these fact sheets with state- or community-specific data (if available).

## EDITORIAL OUTREACH

The community forum format provides an opportunity to discuss specific solutions. The issue and proposed solutions are great fodder for an op-ed, letter to the editor or editorial.

## OP-ED

The op-ed section of a newspaper allows readers to share their opinions about timely issues. Different groups will bring different perspectives to the table on how to solve the problem and those perspectives can be represented in op-eds. Maybe a local elected official would be interested in drafting an op-ed on the importance of SCHIP and Medicaid or a provider who sees uninsured children could write about covering all kids as a first step to covering all Americans. For tips on getting an op-ed placed, ideas on op-ed topics and template op-eds visit [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org). Read the latest news on the issue of health care coverage for timely ideas. You can also sign up to receive the news digest via e-mail.

## EDITORIAL BOARD MEETINGS

A newspaper's editorial section is among the most widely read and influential pages in the paper. As the "voice of the community," the newspaper attempts to articulate the community's values and stake out positions that it believes are in the best interest of the community through its editorials. This makes it an ideal location for an editorial about the importance of health care coverage and the community forum.

The daily editorial page generally includes one or more editorials presenting the official viewpoint of the paper on select local and national issues. Editorials that are written by the newspaper's editorial staff are extremely influential in setting public opinion and mobilizing a community to take action. Studies show that a paper's editorials are particularly well read by influential members of the community, the type of people who get involved, lead others and enact change.

Nearly all newspapers have an editorial board that determines what opinions will be expressed on the paper's editorial page. Editorial board meetings allow interested parties or groups to present their point of view on issues that are important to them and the community. The paper then takes these views into consideration when deciding what editorial stances to take and even what stories to cover. Editorial board meetings usually include the editorial page editor and one or more editorial writers, often accompanied by the reporter who covers the issue being discussed at the meeting.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The letters to the editor section of the newspaper is one of the most widely read sections and offers a good way to express thoughts about the issue of the uninsured and the cost of coverage. The letter should be in response to an editorial, op-ed or article that has already run in the newspaper. A template letter to the editor is available at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org).

## **:: VIII. FOLLOW UP AFTER THE COMMUNITY FORUM**

Some follow-up tasks include:

- Schedule one final meeting of the working groups to celebrate.
- Discuss whether the group would like to continue to work together to address this problem in other ways.
- Send thank you letters to speakers and the moderator. This is also an opportunity to remind speakers about the importance of the issue, tell them who and how many people attended, and discuss media coverage and other meeting outcomes.
- Follow up with interested organizations about meeting outcomes and other activities being planned.
- Follow up with meeting participants. Let them know about other meetings or activities addressing health coverage that are occurring in the community.
- Follow up with reporters who came as well as those who did not. Offer to send a press kit and the press release. For those who came, ask if they need to speak with anyone or if they need more information for their story.

The community forum is an important step in addressing the needs of the uninsured and the health coverage needs of all Americans. This is an important way to be a part of a nationwide movement. But it is only one step. Planning additional activities in the community, and between stakeholders and other interest groups, is an important follow-up step.

### **FINALLY—PLEASE TELL US WHAT YOU DID**

Register your event online at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org). All activities will be included in a report to the nation about what happened in communities across the country. Make sure your community is counted!

## **:: APPENDIX: COMMUNITY FORUM TOOLS**

### **SAMPLE COMMUNITY FORUM AGENDA**

Total Time: 1 hour 40 minutes to 2 hours

- [5 minutes] Welcome and Introductions [moderator]
- [5 minutes] Our Charge and Our Challenge: Purpose of the Community Forum [co-chairs or an elected official] (alternative: moderator can introduce and thank the co-chairs)
- [5 minutes] My Story [business owner who is struggling to provide coverage or can't because costs are too high, uninsured person, family covered by SCHIP]
- [5 minutes] Overview: The Issue [presenter, using PowerPoint tailored to the town]
- [5 minutes] Approaches to Providing Quality Health Coverage for All Americans: Issue 1 (what it is, what it does, pros and cons) [presenter]
- [15 minutes] Discussion: Issue 1 [moderator]  
Questions/comments from the audience with first two comments pre-arranged for balance
- [40–60 minutes] Discussion: Issues 2-3 or up to a total of 4 (5 minutes to present plus 15 minutes of discussion for each)
- [5 minutes] Summary of Discussion [moderator]
- [15 minutes] Closing Response [elected official(s)]

### **SAMPLE TASK LIST AND TIMELINE**

#### **9 weeks before the community forum**

- List volunteers and committees needed
- Schedule a kick-off meeting

#### **7–8 weeks before**

- Hold kick-off meeting
- Establish work groups
- Create a contact sheet of all volunteers and distribute
- Ask participants to share resources in compiling master media list
- Discuss budget and funding sources
- Discuss desired outcomes (purpose) of the meeting and agenda
- Set schedule for regular meetings or calls
- Create and narrow a list of possible event venues, dates and times
- Begin to identify potential speakers and moderators
- Secure event venue, date and time

#### **5–6 weeks before**

- Contact potential speakers and moderator
- Register your event online at [www.CoverTheUninsured.org](http://www.CoverTheUninsured.org)

- Meet with representatives of event venue to clarify site layout, access for the disabled, date of event, time needed for clean-up and set-up, any security guidelines to be followed, space for press (e.g., riser or platform for cameras), point of contact during event, fees, audio-visual equipment needs, and restroom location
- Finalize media list
- Discuss “news hook” to determine what aspects of meeting will be a media draw and what “the story” will be for the event

#### **4 weeks before**

- Finalize contracts with vendors (e.g., event venue, audio-visual rental and equipment rental)
- Follow up on invitations to confirm speakers
- Draft media materials, including the news advisory, news release, bios and fact sheets
- Set up calls/meetings to prepare speakers and moderator
- Contact editorial board of local paper to set up a meeting
- Determine authors for local op-eds and begin drafting
- Draft letters to editor for each local newspaper
- Identify local uninsured person, health care worker and/or business owner to provide personal story at event

#### **3 weeks before**

- Finalize materials (e.g., press fact sheet, calendar listing and news advisory)
- Send out community calendar listings to appropriate media contacts; make follow-up calls
- Print and post fliers in the community and send to organizations for distribution

#### **2 weeks before**

- Finalize all content for press kits
- Send out drop-in articles, op-eds, and letters to the editor; make follow-up calls
- Arrange for representatives to meet with the local newspaper’s editorial board
- Send information to, call or meet with speakers, moderator and spokespersons for event briefing and media training
- Continue to promote attendance
- Create a “day of event” checklist; run through all the steps that need to happen the day of the event; make sure volunteers and materials will be available

#### **1 week before**

- Walk through the event venue and finalize logistics; invite the moderator to meet you there
- Confirm arrangements with all vendors
- Prepare plenty of signage; if there is a walk from the parking lot to the event site, make sure it is clearly marked so that participants and reporters do not get lost and show up late
- Finalize agenda, advisory and news release
- Assemble press kits
- Continue to promote attendance

- Buy film or disposable cameras and ask a volunteer to photograph the event
- Conduct editorial board visits
- Assign specific duties such as:
  - Set-up/tear-down of the event venue
  - Press check-in and management
  - Handling each speaker, moderator
  - Making sure the program runs smoothly (i.e., timing, set-up)

### **Week of the community forum**

- FOUR DAYS PRIOR TO EVENT: Fax news advisory, make follow-up calls to news media contacts (e.g., print, radio and local television), and contact local Associated Press daybook editor
- Schedule pre-event media interviews for spokespersons
- Assign volunteers to confirm participant attendance
- DAY BEFORE: Place reminder calls to all media contacts and re-send the news advisory
- MORNING OF: Check in with media contacts to confirm attendance
- Distribute press release to reporters who did not attend community forum

### **After the community forum**

- Send thank you notes to the moderator, speakers, committee members, etc.
- Make sure all rented equipment has been returned
- Track media coverage and update media lists for future use; send copies of clips to the National Office for inclusion in the national media report; fax materials to (202) 338-4480 or mail them to the National Campaign Office at 1010 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W., Suite 800, Washington DC 20007