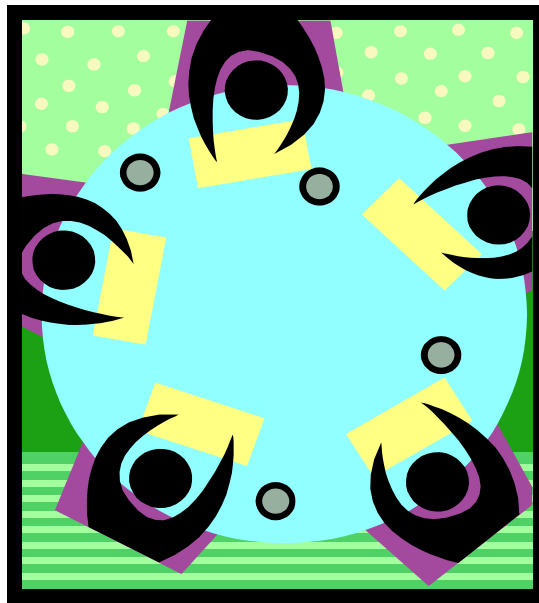


# Planning a Community Forum on Affirmative Action



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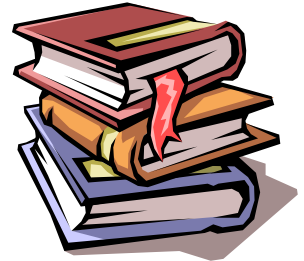
### Why Affirmative Action?

***Because there is a lot at stake—especially for current and future generations of students in their experience and concept of affirmative action in higher education.***

- ❖ There is broad consensus on the important educational benefits of diversity.
- ❖ Consideration of race and ethnicity grows naturally out of the needs of the professions and of American businesses.
- ❖ Advancing the interest of diversity and inclusion is paramount to remedying societal discrimination.
- ❖ In the university setting, the government has a compelling interest in developing cooperative leadership and promoting civic values to deal with the challenges of pluralism.
- ❖ The interests in diversity and inclusion that support well-designed programs of race-specific affirmative action in university admissions do not reflect impermissible stereotyping.

### Statement on Affirmative Action

The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) is the nation's oldest, largest, and most diverse civil rights coalition consisting of more than 180 national organizations representing persons of color, women, children, labor unions, individuals with disabilities, older Americans, major religious groups, gays and lesbians, and civil liberties and human rights groups. Its sister organization, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund (LCCREF) is the research and education arm of the civil rights coalition. LCCREF and Americans for a Fair Chance (AFC), a project of LCCREF, have been committed to affirmative action programs that open doors to opportunities for students from all backgrounds. In a closely watched decision, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that universities may take race into consideration as one factor among many when selecting incoming students. In a 5-4 opinion written by Justice O'Connor, the Court in *Grutter v. Bollinger* specifically endorsed Justice Powell's view in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* that student body diversity is a compelling state interest that can justify using race in university admissions. The Court thus resolves a split among the lower courts as to *Bakke's* value as binding precedent.



### What is a Community Forum on Affirmative Action?

A community forum on affirmative action is an opportunity for proponents of affirmative action to get together and discuss how affirmative action affects their lives, and what steps can be taken to ensure that diversity is maintained in campuses and in the workplace throughout the country. Events could include a briefing, panel presentation, or discussion group.

### Why Community Forums on Affirmative Action Are Needed

As a leading civil rights organization addressing affirmative action, LCCREF is positioned to help organize events around the issue, which can help to do the following:

- ❖ *Generate Public Awareness*

Community forums are opportunities to generate public awareness and discussion on issues. An event around affirmative action will provide a forum for key constituencies such as students to hear knowledgeable individuals talk about the issue, give participants an opportunity to discuss, and strategize with others about action to be taken.

❖ *Increase Your Campus or National Organization's Visibility*

Federal priority issues impact local communities, and public policy activities are often easiest to publicize when this connection is made. Sparking a conversation in your community will gain visibility and energize key constituencies such as students to work on priority issues such as affirmative action.

❖ *Develop Student Leaders and Reach Out to New Individuals*

Providing a forum such as this to your community can develop leadership skills, recruit new activists, and reach out to diverse groups in your community.

**If You Think Affirmative Action Is Too Complex To Discuss**

The goal of a community forum is to draw attention to the issue. Even if every question cannot be answered, or every provision cannot be discussed, your meeting will encourage students in your community to learn more about this important issue.



**Making it happen...**

A community forum on affirmative action can be anything from a statewide, highly publicized forum, to a discussion group with guest experts at a local meeting. It's up to you! Contact the LCCR / LCCREF Grassroots Outreach Department at (202) 263-2861 for help to identify the kind of event you want to plan.

## Planning Step-by Step

### Getting Started

- ❖ **Appoint an event organizer and planning team.** Put together a team of interested key groups - students and coalition partners - to help decide details and share workload. The event organizer will be the key motivator and strategist behind your event. Delegating pieces of the process to the planning team will keep the project manageable for everyone involved.
- ❖ **Recruit coalition partners.** Invite diverse groups to co-sponsor the event.
- ❖ **Decide on an audience.** Everything about the forum, including the issues, co-sponsoring organizations, speakers, location, date, and time, should be designed with the audience in mind. Examples of audiences you might consider: individuals of all ages, students, elected officials and coalition partners and/or civil rights groups.
- ❖ **Set a budget.** While forums can be held for very little money, you may have expenses such as location or speakers' fees, handouts, refreshments, advertising and postage for visibility, and postage for follow-up letters. In-kind contributions and donations from co-sponsors and other organizations are good ways to stretch your resources.
- ❖ **Choose a location.** Choose an accessible site that will attract a wide range of attendees, preferably a well-known and wheelchair accessible site such as a school or community center.
- ❖ **Schedule the event at a convenient time.** Avoid business hours, religious or government holidays, or dates when other community events are scheduled.
- ❖ **Decide on a format.** Will your event be a briefing? Panel discussion? A moderated debate? Regardless of format, forums should last not more than two hours.



### SAMPLE TIMELINE

#### **6 Weeks Before Event**

Appoint organizer and planning team.  
Contact coalition partners.  
Decide on an audience.

#### **5 Weeks Before Event**

Plan budget.  
Decide on location and format.  
Invite moderator/speakers.

#### **4 Weeks Before Event**

Finalize date and location.  
Finalize panel speakers.

#### **3 Weeks Before Event**

Begin advertising event.  
Compile list of media contacts.  
Send invitations to coalition partners and other important guests.

#### **2 Weeks Before Event**

Re-confirm speakers.  
Increase audience recruitment.  
Prepare on-site handouts and media packet.

#### **Choose spokesperson(s).**

#### **5 Days Before Event**

Fax media advisory.  
Finalize media packets.  
Call coalition partners to assess attendance.

#### **2 Days Before Event**

Make media reminder calls.

#### **Day of Event**

Fax news release.  
Be prepared to answer media questions before and after the event.

#### **After Event**

Follow up with media.  
Thank participants.

## First Steps In Depth

As an event convener, you are the key motivator and strategist behind this event. Delegating pieces of the process will keep the project manageable for everyone involved. The following are some steps to follow:

### Delegate work to a planning team.

Appoint a planning team to divide and oversee the following responsibilities:

- ❖ Programming
- ❖ Coalition outreach
- ❖ Community promotion and media visibility

### Share the timeline and checklists.

Give each member of your committee a copy of the appropriate timeline and checklist.



### Develop a budget.

Work with your planning team to develop a budget. You may have expenses such as location or speakers' fees, handouts, refreshments, advertising and postage for visibility, and postage for follow-up letters. In-kind contributions and donations from co-sponsors and other organizations are good ways to stretch your resources.

### Strategies for saving money:

- ❖ *Trade ads for copies.* Create relationships with local copy shops and discuss the possibility of getting free copies in return for advertising their name on the back of your brochures or flyers.
- ❖ *Ask co-sponsors to help.* Offer local businesses and coalition partners the opportunity to co-sponsor events in exchange for free meeting locations, phone line use, copy privileges, and advertising expenses.
- ❖ *Use the media for public service announcements.* Ask a local radio or TV station to facilitate a forum in exchange for free news coverage and some public service announcements regarding the event.

### Next Steps

*Invite moderators or speakers.* Choose three or four nonpartisan, credible panelists who will bring media attention to the event. Pick speakers varying in age, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and occupation. A well-known, nonpartisan moderator who is respected in the community will generate interest in the event and give your work added credibility

- ❖ *Plan media outreach and spokesperson.* Outreach to the media will help and advertise your event and gain visibility.
- ❖ *Promote your event in the community.*

### **Choose a location.**

Work with your planning team to determine a location that will accommodate the size crowd you are expecting and will attract a range of people from the community. Ask the site manager about the following:

- ❖ wheelchair accessibility
- ❖ podiums
- ❖ sound systems
- ❖ bringing your own refreshments
- ❖ electrical outlets for television and radio crews
- ❖ literature tables
- ❖ janitorial services
- ❖ extra chairs



### **Get affirmative action materials from LCCREF/AFC.**

Contact Erica Williams, Field Assistant, at 202/263-2861 for comprehensive materials on affirmative action.

### **After the event, follow up on action strategies.**

Work with your committee to follow up on any action strategies that result from the event.

### **Follow up with attendees.**

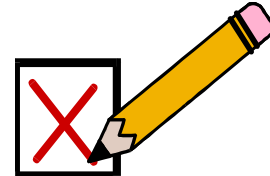
Use the registration list as a mailing list for future meetings and to contact participants.

## Programming Checklist

Tailor your event to the following goals: generate public awareness and discussion on issues; provide a forum for people to hear key individuals talk about affirmative action; give participants an opportunity to discuss options; and enable them to strategize with others about action to be taken.

### Decide on an audience.

Determine the audience you would like to reach. Examples include: students, general public, elected officials and coalition partners.



### Develop an agenda/format.

Choose the most appropriate format to achieve your goals and accommodate the people you want to attract. You may want a briefing, panel presentation, or discussion groups. The community forum should last no longer than two hours. If you decide on a panel of speakers with discussion, the following is a sample agenda:

- ❖ Student leader introduces moderator and key coalition partners by (5 minutes)
- ❖ Moderator introduces panelists (5 minutes)
- ❖ Three panelists each speak for 10 minutes (30 minutes)
- ❖ Moderator leads discussion session with audience (40 minutes)
- ❖ Student leader wraps up with key messages, a call to action, and thanks all for participating (10 minutes)

### Select panelists or discussion leaders.

Choose nonpartisan, credible individuals who will bring media attention to the event. Speakers should represent a variety of ages, ethnic backgrounds, and physical ability; and be affected by, or work with, affirmative action programs. This could include a coalition partner, legislators (as long as you invite one from each party), a university administrator (e.g. dean of admissions) or someone with a personal story about the importance of affirmative action.



### Invite a familiar face to be a moderator.

The moderator could be a media personality, student, or coalition partner. A well-known, nonpartisan moderator who is respected in your community will generate interest in the event and give your work added credibility.

### Recruit notetakers.

Recruit volunteers to record the proceedings, especially action strategies and next steps, of the affirmative action event.

### Provide materials.

Work with the panelists, coalition partners, and the other participants to make relevant materials available, including:

- ❖ Sign-in list
- ❖ Position Papers

- ❖ Fact Sheets
- ❖ Articles
- ❖ Legal Briefs
- ❖ Brochures

**Meet, brief, and escort all speakers on the day of the event.**

**After the event, thank the panelists and moderator in writing.**



## Coalition Outreach Checklist

It is in the best interest of coalition building to involve other groups as soon as possible. This may lengthen the planning process, and could require more negotiation, but it will build better long-term relationships among organizations. Americans for A Fair Chance is a nonpartisan consortium of six of America's leading civil rights legal organizations, including:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ❖ Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law     | <a href="http://www.lawyerscomm.org">www.lawyerscomm.org</a>                 |
| ❖ Mexican American Legal Defense & Educational Fund | <a href="http://www.maldef.org">www.maldef.org</a>                           |
| ❖ NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Inc.                    | <a href="http://www.naacpldf.org">www.naacpldf.org</a>                       |
| ❖ National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium  | <a href="http://www.napalc.org">www.napalc.org</a>                           |
| ❖ National Women's Law Center                       | <a href="http://www.nwlc.org">www.nwlc.org</a>                               |
| ❖ National Partnership for Women and Families       | <a href="http://www.nationalpartnership.org">www.nationalpartnership.org</a> |

### **Make a list of existing organizations or reach out to new ones.**

Following are suggested types of organizations to contact:

- ❖ women's organizations
- ❖ Hispanic organizations
- ❖ Asian Pacific American organizations
- ❖ African-American organizations
- ❖ gay and lesbian organizations
- ❖ student organizations



### **Contact local groups to co-sponsor the event.**

Contact local groups through e-mail, fliers, newsletters, and phone trees, or attend their meetings. Invite them to co-sponsor the event, help plan it, and/or send participants.

The week before the event, call coalition partners to gauge attendance.

### **After the event, thank and debrief coalition partners.**

Follow up to discuss ways to work together in the future on common issues of interest.

## Community Promotion And Media Visibility Checklist

Event promotion can be a lot of fun. Your goals are to inform the public of the event in order to increase attendance, and to inform the media to heighten awareness of your organization's position on affirmative action.



### Inform the public

Determine whose phone number to use on all public information materials

- ❖ Inform organization members and neighboring branches of your event and recruit them to attend.
- ❖ Work with the coalition outreach chair to send invitations to coalition partners and other important guests.
- ❖ Invite the public using ads, fliers, public service announcements on the radio and cable television, and meeting announcements in the newspaper.
- ❖ Encourage the moderator and other speakers to promote the forum.
- ❖ On the day of the event, place a sign outside the location.

### Inform the media.

Compile a list of media contacts. Learn which editors and departments cover affirmative action in your city.

- ❖ Designate a media spokesperson to be available to the press. Put her/his name on all news releases and mailings that go out to media.
- ❖ Fax an advisory to your media list five to seven days before your event. An advisory is a concise notice listing the event's purpose, content, location, and participants. Fax the advisory again a day or two before the event as a reminder.
- ❖ Call reporters the day after you send your advisory. Explain that you are following up on your written materials. If they haven't seen the materials, offer to fax them again.
- ❖ Send a news release the day of the event and make a final round of reminder calls.
- ❖ Prepare a table with a sign-in list and media kits for all members of the media. Fill your kits with the following items:
  - ✓ Agenda
  - ✓ Statements from the speakers
  - ✓ Press release
  - ✓ Background information on your organization and other co-sponsors
  - ✓ Position paper and/or fact sheets on affirmative action.
- ❖ During the event, offer reporters a quick interview before or after the program.
- ❖ Follow-up: call reporters who did not attend the event and offer additional information, including the media kit so they can publish an article on your event. Also contact reporters who attended to ask if they need additional information or quotes to complete their stories.
- ❖ Look for press clips in the newspaper and on television.