

Letter Writing Power Hour

Another way for homeless and low income people to become involved in the democratic process is to organize a letter writing event, during which they will have the opportunity to voice their opinion on an issue by writing a letter to their representatives. A “power hour” is a one-hour activity where you and a group of your peers will become educated on an issue and then hold a letter writing campaign to have your voices heard on the selected issue.

1) Choose an Issue

The first thing that you must decide is what issue to write about. You may decide to select a topic of interest or of concern. You may choose to write about a recent event in the community, a general topic such as homelessness, or a specific topic or piece of legislation such as one concerning livable wages. Selecting an issue will also help you decide which officials you are going to target. If it is regarding a local issue, you will want to address your local and state officials. If your issue is a national one or broader in scope, you will want to address your federal officials.

2) Get Educated

Once you have selected an issue, it is a good idea to research background information on the topic. You can go to the local library, watch the news or browse the Internet to research current information for the topic. The internet is perhaps the most helpful when researching an issue because many organizations who concentrate on a certain issue area have websites with all of their publications, resources, and research documents available for the public. Large organizations may also have specialized fact sheets or even sample letters to aid in letter writing campaigns.

3) Be Prepared

Make sure you have the necessary materials to conduct the power hour. Since most public officials now have email addresses, you might want to ask a few people to bring laptop computers with internet access. Have the laptops set up and ready for the participants to draft and send an email. If this is not feasible, get paper, pens, stamps, and envelopes and make sure that you have all of the addresses of your local, state and national officials with you. By being prepared it will be easier to mail the letters immediately after the power hour.

4) Hold the “Power Hour”

When you hold the “power hour,” first give a brief presentation on the issue so that everyone has some information on the subject. Offering a sample letter will help provide crucial information on the issue and make the letter writing considerably easier. Also, you may want to pass out a brief information sheet so people will have enough information to write an effective letter. Besides the facts, a critical part of a letter to an elected official, whether a local or national official, is a personal connection the letter writer has to a given issue. Encourage letter writers to include personal stories and the reasons housing issues

and homelessness are important to them. Remember, however, that you should not take a position for or against a candidate or party. The letter writers may express their political opinions, but you may not.

As people are writing or finishing writing their letters, record the letter writer's name and the recipient of his or her letter. In addition, pass around a sign-in sheet so that you can record who was in attendance. This makes it easier to follow-up on the status of a letter and to hold future political functions. Finally, mail the letters and remind the letter writers to forward any responses they receive to the event coordinator.