STEP 2: Educate Your Community

A. Where to Find Like-Minded People in Your Community

Once you're comfortable with the basics of gun violence prevention, it's time to start educating your family, friends and community. We suggest you plan an event in a community group that you operate in day to day. Some examples: friends and clubs at school, sports team, choir/band, youth group, house of faith, PTA, Elks/Kiwanis etc., alumni organizations, business associations, honor society, political activism organization (League of Women Voters, Indivisible etc.). Every group is an opportunity to spread the message that common-sense gun laws work to save lives.

Once you have identified your community, choose an event that makes sense for them. Here are some of the events we have participated in:

- School assemblies
- Concerts
- Movie screening - See our Guide to Gun Violence Prevention Movies in the online Library of Resources
- Company parties
- Trainings
- Dinner parties
- Panel discussions
- Faith services
- Small or large house parties to advocate and raise money for gun violence prevention groups

Once you have identified which of your networks you will be working with, try to recruit friends, fellow students, parents or coworkers to help.
How to plan a community event:
1. Form a committee and assign easy tasks, including database management and marketing (poster making).
2. Tap into your existing networks for potential speakers (Eg. ER doctors, police officers, victims, survivors, local elected officials, first responders, gun violence prevention organizations).
3. Before committing to a venue or a time, reach out to all like-minded local organizations/clubs/community for potential event conflicts. If none exist, invite the memberships of those groups to attend your event as members of your community.
4. Pick a venue with a built-in audience. (Eg: a place of worship; a school or college auditorium; or local music venue supportive of reducing gun violence. Must be handicapped accessible.)
5. Send a "Save the Date" by Instagram, Twitter, email or other social media networks.
6. Respect the privacy of any victims and survivors who might not want to participate in the planning or attend.
7. Alert your local media and state and national elected officials of the confirmed event details with a simple one paragraph Media Advisory before the event and Press Release on the day of the event.

Sample 30-minute format:
5 mins- Introduction by organizers describing why this issue is important to them and how it affects their community
10-15 mins- Local expert speaks about the issue, provides locale specific facts about gun laws and toll of gun violence
10-15 mins- discussion with the audience

Check out the online Library of Resources for sample 45-minute, 60-minute, 90-minute and 2-hour formats for events
STEP 2: Educate Your Community
C. Messaging and drafting Opinion Editorial or Letter to the Editor for local news outlets

Opinion Editorials (op-eds) and letters to the editor (LTE) are an effective way to reach a large audience through local newspapers, magazines, weeklies and blogs. They are some of the most read sections of publications and can be used to influence public opinion on policies. For some examples of effective letters to the editor, see the online Resources Library.

Drafting your own Op-Ed or LTE, is simple if you stay focused on a core main idea. The Community Tool Box, created by the University of Kansas, suggests the following steps:
1) Open with a simple salutation (greeting), like "To the Editor"
2) Grab the readers' attention
3) Explain what the letter is about
4) Explain why the issue is important
5) Give evidence for any praise or criticism
6) State your opinion about what should be done
7) Keep it brief
8) Sign the letter
9) Check your letter to make sure it's clear and to the point

Newspapers publish op-eds/LTE that are a variety of lengths, check with the newspaper of your choice to determine the optimal length.

STEP 2: Educate Your Community
D. Communicating with your elected officials

There are five main ways to communicate with your elected officials directly:

1) **Town Hall style meeting**: These meetings are open to the public, although some elected officials require you to RSVP.
   Pro: Constituents are able to ask questions to the elected officials.
   Con: A large audience may prevent all attendees to ask a question.

2) **Planned private meetings with elected officials or staff**: You can call any elected officials and ask for a private meeting with them in their office.
   Pro: You'll be able to speak directly with elected officials or their staff.
   Con: Getting on an elected official's calendar can take weeks of advance notice and can be cancelled on short notice.

3) **Emails/written correspondence**: In addition to a physical mailing address, most elected officials have an email address or online form to submit a comment.
   Pro: You can write out a clear statement of support from your home; it is easy to convince friends and family to join you in this effort.
   Con: Most of the time you will receive no response from your elected official; this correspondence works best in bulk (when many people write about the same issue to the same elected official).
STEP 2: Educate Your Community

D. Communicating with your elected officials

4) Phone calls: Most elected officials have a main phone number for constituents to call for any reason at all.
   Pro: You usually get to speak to a real human or at the very least leave a message that a real human conveys to the elected official.
   Con: Calls in support of a policy are most effective when they are cumulative (multiple people call).

5) Office drop-ins: Most elected officials have offices open to the public during normal business hours. As a constituent you may stop by to state your opinion on any matter.
   Pro: You are able to state your case in person
   Con: You are usually talking to a lower level staff, you very rarely get to speak to the elected official.

"When I receive five calls on any one issue in any one day, I consider that my phone ringing off the hook and that we need to take action." - Massachusetts State Representative
STEP 2: Educate Your Community
D. Communicating with your elected officials

In all communication with your elected officials be sure to include the following critical points: confirm that you are a constituent, why this issue is important to you, a specific action you want them to take.

For calls: Be sure to mention that you are a constituent of the elected official and provide your address if the staff member asks for it. Then clearly and concisely lay out the problem you see and the solution that your elected official can provide.

Sample call in support of specific bill:
Hi, my name is Jane Smith. I live in Representative Connolly’s district at 123 Main St., in Suburbia, Kansas. I’m calling because I want them to vote in favor of House Bill 4321, sponsored by Representative Brown. I’m worried that shootings like Parkland and Sandy Hook are not isolated incidents and I think it is time that Rep. Connolly and their fellow legislators stand up to the gun lobby and push Rep. Brown’s extreme risk protective order bill, House Bill 4321 to prevent mass shootings in Kansas.
STEP 2: Educate Your Community

D. Communicating with your elected officials

For emails & written correspondence: Follow the steps outlined in the previous Op-ed/LTE section but be sure to include your full name and address and a mention that you are a constituent. In addition, be sure to mention any previous actions that the elected official has done that you support or oppose and any action that you want them to take.

Pro Tip:
Since the 2016 election, The Indivisible Guide, linked to in the online Library of Resources, has been a major resource for individuals and small groups looking to influence the decisions of members of congress. The Guide offers a framework and rationalization for being in contact, early and often, with your elected officials, specifically members of congress. We have included a link to the full Indivisible Guide in our Library of resources. As the Indivisible Guide points out, their guide is almost purely defensive, based on the fact that it was written to resist a conservative agenda. In this tool kit we are clearly advocating for positive policy changes as well. That said, we believe many of the tactics outlined in the Indivisible Guide are useful and informative for positive policy change.