



There's No Place Like Home (To Raise Money)

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One of the most helpful projects supporters can undertake for your campaign is agreeing to host a fundraising event in their home. Your campaign needs to raise money -- and a supporter hosting an event in his or her home is a generous contribution of time and energy.

In fact, home parties can be an integral part of your finance plan. Maryland Governor Bob Ehrlich, during his successful campaign in 2002, attended more than 200 house parties. Some events were ticketed at \$100 a person; others were priced at \$250 and higher. His finance chairman estimates that more than \$5 million was raised at these events.

Rather than printing 30 different invitations for 30 different fundraising events (and paying all those printing costs), coordinate your house parties around one common theme.

Former Congressman Bill Barrett (NE-3) launched a series of **BBQ with Bill** events around his congressional district. The campaign used an attractive and eye-catching invitation with a checkerboard border that was blank in the middle, and printed 10,000. As volunteers were recruited to host events, the specific information (time, place, and cost) was simply copied onto each invitation. A **BBQ with Bill** in a small town may cost only \$15 per person; the same event in a larger city may cost \$75 per couple. We could personalize each invitation to the needs of each host.

We also provided **event information** packets for each host, which included a cover letter from the Congressman thanking the host; sample menu suggestions (how much hamburger do I need to buy to serve 25 guests?), a fill-in-the-blank press release about the event for the host to send to the local weekly newspaper; a list of helpful tips (such as providing name tags and having a sign-in table); and a list of past contributors from the area with phone numbers for following up.

Here's some advice for your supporters who want to host an event in their home:

1. **Have the volunteer host work with your scheduler and finance director to pick a date.** Try to allow at least 30 days.
2. **Ask your volunteer hosts to invite their colleagues from the workplace, friends, relatives and neighbors.** Suggest to the volunteers to look at their Christmas card list. Have them invite lots more people than they think will actually attend. Not everyone will come, and some will be out-of-town. If they invite 200 people and 25 or 30 actually attend, that's a success. Some people will send checks even if they don't attend. Hand addressed invitations are preferable to labels.
3. **Decide who is responsible for sending out the invitations.** If the volunteer hosts are sending out the invitations, make sure they keep track of all printing costs and postage receipts. Federal election law is strict about in-kind expenditures to a campaign -- these expenses must be documented and reported as a contribution from the host. (Briefly review the definition of in-kind contributions: Contributions of goods and services for a candidate, not direct cash. Federal campaigns are prohibited from receiving corporate contributions.)

The invitation needs to tell potential guests the time, day and date, place, cost of the event, the name of the campaign committee (who to make the checks payable to), and where to RSVP. Include both a phone number and a mailing address for checks. Depending on the kind of event they choose to hold, volunteer hosts may wish to denote the suggested dress for the occasion.

Many party and paper stores now sell very attractive 2 x 11 pre-designed invitations. All volunteer hosts have to do is personalize the information about the event using a computer and print/copy onto the pre-designed invitation. This will save a fortune on printing costs.

Remember that all invitations must carry proper disclaimer information to conform to federal laws; make sure your campaign approves text and confirms all legal requirements before the invitation is printed.

4. **Mail invitations at least three weeks before the event.** Phone call follow-ups and personal solicitation are critical to the success of your event. It's easy to ignore an invitation -- it's not so easy to ignore a phone call or visit.

5. **Have your finance directors set fundraising goals for each event.** In this example, let's say the finance director gives the volunteer hosts a goal of raising \$3,000. The hosts will have to decide whether they think they can find 30 people to contribute \$100 each or if it's more realistic to find 60 people who will contribute \$50 each. Some campaigns suggest \$100 per couple or \$75 per person. Set realistic goals.
6. **The event can be as casual or formal as your hosts wish -- whatever fits their individual entertainment style.** Some hosts hire a caterer or ask their favorite restaurant to provide the food; others prepare the food themselves. Be creative and have fun; the event doesn't have to be the standard "cold quiche" affair. Have your hosts use their imagination to personalize the event for their friends. Barbeques, ice cream socials and backyard picnics are good summer events. Choose the event which will maximize the resources your hosts have available and will make money for the campaign. You want people to enjoy themselves, but also keep it simple.

More party hosts are skipping hard liquor in favor of beer, wine, fruit juices and soft drinks. You save money and don't have to worry as much about liability. Make sure any guest who drinks too much has a safe ride home.

Federal election law prohibits individuals from contributing more than \$2,100 in the primary and \$2,100 in the general. However, these "maxed-out" donors are allowed to spend up to an additional \$1,000 to host an event in their home. Ensure legal compliance.

7. **It is easier to keep track of who is attending if you have a registration table for guests as they walk in the door.** Make sure you ask for their name, address and phone number. Name tags are important so you'll quickly recognize the guest. If your campaign doesn't supply name tags, the hosts can buy them at any party/paper or office supply store. Someone with good (legible) printing should make the name tags, not the guest. Calligraphy pens (those with a wider point) are easier to read than ballpoint pens.
8. **Determine whether you want to address the group (informally) or just want to mingle with the guests.** Most of the time, you'll want to say just a few remarks.

Usually about 45 minutes to an hour into an event, it's appropriate for the hosts to ask for everyone's attention so they can introduce you. Your campaign should provide a short narrative biography to the person is going to introduce you. While it's important to mention official items, try to

personalize your introduction. Since this is a reception, not a speech, you should only make brief remarks.

9. **Are there enough parking spaces available in the neighborhood for guests?** Depending on availability and expected turn out, many hosts ask responsible young adults to park the vehicles.
10. **Your campaign needs to send thank you notes out to guests in a timely manner.** The hosts need to give the campaign the checks and the guest register (with full names, addresses and phone numbers) as soon as they can. If any of the guests attended and still need to pay, have your finance person remind them; you may also receive money from people who couldn't attend but still contributed to your campaign. Finally, make sure your campaign receives an itemized accounting of the expenses for the event so it can be reported as an *in-kind* contribution to your campaign.