

**The Partnership for  
Responsible Drug Information**

**Guide to organizing  
FORUMS  
on drug issues**



**By Aaron D. Wilson, Associate Director, PRDI**

*with*

**Rodney Skager, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus UCLA  
Board Chairman, Los Angeles Drug Policy Reform Group  
(a PRDI affiliate)**

**Mary M. Cleveland, Ph.D., Research Director, PRDI**



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ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR:  
 AARON D. WILSON

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR:  
 PAUL BENNETT  
 24 West 68 Street  
 New York, NY 10023-5037  
 PRDI Phone: 212-362-1964  
 NYU Phone: 212-675-2362  
 Fax: 212-724-0567  
 Websites: <http://www.prdi.org/>  
<http://www.nyu.edu/>  
 e-mail: [haines@prdi.org](mailto:haines@prdi.org)

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Dear Drug Policy Reformer:

In 1996-97, the Partnership for Responsible Drug Information (PRDI) conducted a series of six major drug policy forums in Manhattan. Speakers included Federal District Judge Robert Sweet, Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke, New Haven Police Chief Nicholas Pastore, Former US Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders, and ABC 20/20 Anchor Hugh Downs. We also have helped groups conduct forums in several other cities. Our success with these forums encouraged us to create this guide.

In our experience, drug policy forums serve multiple purposes. They make expertise and accurate information available to the public and the media. They create an event that attracts attention to the consequences of our current drug policies. Forums also provide a simple, feasible project around which new drug policy reform groups can organize. We have prepared this guide primarily for such groups. An additional resource we provide is *The PRDI Drug Policy Resources Directory for the Media*, which contains nearly 200 individuals with expertise on many drug policy issues. Our office staff can provide yet more assistance at 212-362-1964.

We welcome suggestions and improvements on the content, layout, indexing, advice and other features of this Guide.

Thomas H. Haines  
 Chair, Executive Committee, PRDI  
 Chair, Biochemistry, CUNY Medical School

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*“In any war, the first casualty is common sense, and the second is free and open discussion.”*

James Reston, The New York Times, 1965

## **1. Why PRDI forums?**

Ideal criteria for any public policy include:

- Clear objectives, attainable at reasonable cost
- A foundation in sound scientific and sociological research
- Consistency with principles of fairness and justice embodied in the US Constitution
- Consistency with international principles of human rights
- Openness to debate and criticism

In its mindless, brutal and costly drive to create a “drug-free America” the US “war on drugs” clearly violates such criteria.

At the Partnership for Responsible Drug Information, we believe that better policy can and will evolve only in an atmosphere of “free and open discussion.”

Community forums help create that atmosphere.

## **2. Community forums as a reform strategy**

Staging *community forums* that inform opinion-makers and attract media attention is a major component of our program to effect change. Forums are public events where the general community or a selected audience can interact with qualified experts on drugs and drug policy issues.

Community forums can achieve the following specific goals:

- Build a broad-based coalition for reform
- Publicize arguments for reform
- Raise the public profile of reform issues and organizations
- Educate opinion-makers and the public directly and through the media
- Attract new people and resources to an organization
- Change the political environment

Forums can be organized by a small group of people. To be “safe” for prominent participants, they must be non-confrontational, present a range of opinions, and be closely managed by the organizers.

### **Components of the community forum**

PRDI forums follow a consistent structure with the following main elements:

- A featured *speaker* of unquestioned integrity and reputation who is well-known to the public

- Four to six expert *panelists* who present informed opinion on the topic of the forum and represent a range of viewpoints (including support for current drug policy)
- A *moderator* who introduces the speaker and panelists, facilitates discussion and referees questions from the audience
- An *audience* made up of members of the community at large or recruited from one or more influential targeted groups

The event begins with a brief introduction by a *spokesperson* from the local organizing group who describes the group and its mission and thanks the participants and audience for taking part in the event. The spokesperson then introduces the *moderator* for the evening. The latter explains the structure of the forum and rules for audience participation. The moderator then introduces the *speaker*. The latter usually has 30 minutes to address the forum topic.

When the speaker has finished, the moderator introduces members of the *panel*. At this point each of the panelists can make a 5-10 minute presentation (with more than four panelists little time will be left for audience questions). The alternative is to proceed immediately to audience questions for the remainder of the forum.

At the end, the moderator wraps up the discussion, reminds the audience to fill out the volunteer/ mailing list cards, and thanks everyone for attending. Two hours provide sufficient time to address the forum topic and exhaust the attention span of most audiences.

### **Audience participation**

Local organizers must determine the form of audience participation. For a diverse community audience PRDI recommends an approach that assures that only pertinent and significant questions reach the speaker and panel. (Forums held for a smaller, selected group may permit direct questioning by members of the audience.)

In the typical PRDI forum, members of the audience are given printed cards on which to write their questions. The cards can be inserted in the event program. Questions may be directed to the speaker or a specific panel member or the discussants as a whole. Cards are collected after the speaker finishes and throughout the following discussion (the ushers hand additional cards to those who request them). A member of the organizing group then screens the questions. He or she passes the best questions to the moderator who puts them to the panel and speaker.

PRDI has also allowed audience members to ask questions directly from open microphones. With a general audience, we have found that open microphones diminish both the quality and quantity of questions. Questioners are often inarticulate, or attempt to make a speech, or ask irrelevant or bizarre questions.

### **3. Getting started**

#### **Defining the issues**

Local affiliates of PRDI should emphasize issues that reflect the concerns of their members. Defining focus and mission is the first task for the organizing group. These choices will determine the type of people who attend events and join the group. Whatever the issues, co-sponsors, speakers, panelists, venue, and advertising should always project the image of professionalism and responsibility.

#### **Setting priorities for action**

Once a core group has formed and decided on the issues, the group must set priorities. To facilitate this process, this handbook contains lists of specific tasks involved in organizing a community forum and suggested timelines for their completion. Here are tips on prioritizing those tasks:

- Draw up a “to-do” list. Writing down all the tasks that need to be done will help assure that they will actually be done.
- Once the “to-do” list has been developed, determine the order in which specific tasks must be done as well as the relative importance of each. Tasks that are most important usually need to be done sooner rather than later.
- A useful device for organizing tasks is a simple matrix with tasks listed in a column at the left and calendar periods across the top. Completion dates are inserted in the intersections of tasks and months. You may add the priority rating for each task and who is responsible.

#### **Delegating tasks (organizer)**

Delegating responsibility for tasks is a vital element in a forum organizing effort. Individuals taking on too much responsibility face burnout, while others are discouraged from showing initiative or learning for themselves. Delegating responsibility is also the most compelling way to involve people. Here are tips on delegation:

- Divide the organizing tasks into clearly defined pieces. Each member must understand his or her responsibilities. Take the time to go over necessary steps to achieve the desired result.
- Delegate authority and specify limits of discretion. Authority includes spending, use of resources, making decisions without prior approval of the group, and agreements negotiated with vendors or outside groups. Inform others who will be affected by the delegation and those people within the organization whose cooperation and assistance is necessary.
- If the organizer’s workload is excessive, delegate urgent tasks but not top priority. It is better to delegate rather than have a task go undone.

- The person accepting a task must feel accountable for completing it. Establish how success will be assessed. Be clear on how progress will be monitored. More complex tasks may benefit from checklist or flow chart. Making these expectations clear at the beginning will avoid frustration later on. Involving the person in these decisions helps ensure that he or she accepts responsibility and commits to completing the task.
- Provide necessary resources and encouragement, including assistants. Feedback throughout the process greatly increases the probability that the job will be done right and on time. Also avoid unnecessary re-assertion of control over a task that was previously delegated.
- Delegate both pleasant and unpleasant tasks. Ensure that everyone shares in both the interesting and rewarding tasks and in the grunge work.
- Mistakes are inevitable. While mistakes should be treated seriously, don't blame or criticize. Instead, treat the situation as a learning experience by discussing how the mistake occurred and identify ways to avoid similar mistakes in the future.
- Recognize situations in which delegation will *not* work. Delegation is not advisable when the person is already overloaded. It is also inappropriate when the person lacks the necessary experience or expertise, and time or resources are not available for training. Neither will it be effective if the would-be delegator wants to retain full control or take credit for the work.

#### **4. Resources for running forums**

This section describes some of the resources available to assist local groups in planning and organizing events.

##### **Technical assistance**

The staff and leadership of PRDI are available to supply technical assistance, depending on needs. This assistance includes:

- Identifying through our database people in your area who may be interested in working on a forum
- Locating high-profile speakers and quality panelists to address the topics you have selected
- Providing lists of media in your area, along with phone, fax and mailing addresses. In some cities PRDI has developed relationships with specific editors and journalists
- Advising on, and limited editing of, press advisories, releases, pitch letters, press packets, publicity materials (leaflets and posters), event programs, etc.
- Providing moderate quantities of quality literature related to drug policy reform generally, and, if possible, to the specific topic(s) of your forum



- Advising and brainstorming on ideas to make your event successful

## **Funding**

PRDI has only very limited funds available to help local projects with start up. However, staff members can help develop an event budget and a fundraising plan for local funding, not only for forums but also for long-term support of the local organization.

Here are suggestions on raising start-up money for the group as well as funding for a forum:

- Members of the core group should contribute a small amount to help get things started. The amount depends on member's means, perhaps \$25, \$50 or even \$100 dollars each. These funds should be used as seed money to raise more funds. Core group members should not have to contribute more than once a year.
- Investigate local foundations and organizations for funding potential. Formal grant applications require significant lead-time and careful preparation. Books on grantsmanship are available at many bookstore and public libraries.
- If you have a mailing list, try sending a fundraising letter. Include a brief statement about your organization and its purpose, describe the forum topic and process, what the event will accomplish, and lastly the amount of money needed and how it will be spent.
- The letter should be no more than two pages. Information about the organization and the planned event should be on the first page. Do not assume that readers already know the issues. Avoid jargon and be optimistic about the feasibility of the event and value of its outcomes.
- Approach wealthy individuals in the community who have expressed interest in drug policy reform issues. Letters to the editor sections of local papers may contain sympathetic letters from potential contributors.

## **Looking after the money**

Even if your organization has no formal officers, you need a reliable and trustworthy *treasurer*. You may be able to recruit a CPA to your group by placing a classified ad in the newsletter of the local professional society for accountants. However, the treasurer ordinarily need not be a professional accountant. Here are some basic rules for managing the group's finances:

- Keep paper records for every transaction. Never disburse funds without having a bill that you can *date* and mark *paid* or a receipt signed by the person who received money. If you have both, clip them together and make a note on one referring to the other. This will ensure that you do not pay a bill twice.

- Purchase a *receipt book* (available in almost any stationary store) with numbered receipts and carbon copies that remain in the book. Always give a receipt for any money that you receive.
- Buy a basic *accounting book* and enter immediately amounts received and disbursed. Easy to use accounting books are available at most stationary stores. User-friendly accounting computer programs are also available.
- If there are large sums of money, open a *bank account* in the organization's name. Your group must decide who will have signature authority (it is best that two people sign a check). Select people easy to contact to minimize delays in payment.
- The cardinal rule in keeping track of your money is *write it down*. This is the best safeguard against mistakes and accusations of wrongdoing.

### **Co-sponsors**

PRDI seeks to engage individuals and organizations across a wide spectrum of political beliefs. We invite co-sponsors among organizations and institutions concerned about drug or criminal justice policy, drug abuse prevention and treatment, civil and human rights, public health, and social justice issues. Only established and respected organizations should be approached.

Co-sponsors must commit to the following:

- Allowing their name to be listed as an official co-sponsor on all publicity and literature produced for the event
- Assisting in publicizing the event, especially through distribution of announcements and flyers through their mailing lists, newsletter, web sites, and other modes of communication

PRDI does not request funding from its co-sponsors, although they may agree to contribute other resources such as venue, press contacts, speakers or panelists, and literature for distribution at the forum. The most important contribution is their good name.

Co-sponsorship brings other benefits. The movement expands by involvement of previously neutral groups in the drug policy debate. Association with the right groups can greatly increase forum credibility, particularly with media and opinion-makers. While most co-sponsors help only moderately with publicity, occasionally one may contribute significantly to attendance. Relationships with co-sponsors can be lasting. The relationship may continue, or co-sponsors may initiate their own drug policy reform efforts.

Recruiting co-sponsors can be challenging. PRDI has secured co-sponsorship from major institutions by beginning several months in advance, presenting a professional, well-organized and mainstream image, and stressing the need to open up debate (without being identified with legalization or decriminalization). It also

helped that members of our Board of Directors were involved in many of those institutions.

Here is the basic process of securing co-sponsors:

- Identify the major non-governmental institutions in your area. Which are household names? (Check the list of PRDI co-sponsors in the sample program in Section 9 for ideas).
- Decide which ones might be interested in your topic. Alternatively, pick a topic coinciding with the interests of organizations you want to involve.
- Telephone to ask who has the authority to approve a co-sponsorship. Later send that person a formal invitation to participate in the forum (see Section 9).
- Once a potential co-sponsor agrees, ask the authority originally contacted to appoint a staff member to be your contact person.
- Send forum invitations and thank-you letters afterwards, to the contact person and leadership of each co-sponsor.

## **5. Publicity**

Publicity is a vital element of a forum. It not only affects the size of your audience, but also the level of media coverage.

Good publicity also supports the political strategy of the forum concept. Community forums are meant to change the social and political environment of a community. Every flyer read, every radio PSA, every listing in local papers also works to change this environment. No matter how great the impact of the forum on those who attend, it is just as important that your community knows about the forum.

Good publicity will also increase respect for your organization and, by association, drug policy reform itself. Materials must look professional and read well.. Section 9 contains examples of PRDI publicity materials. Consider these a starting point for your own efforts.

### **Developing a publicity plan**

A *publicity plan* is document outlining publicity efforts to be undertaken. Deadlines are included. Everyone in the core group should receive a copy at your regular committee meetings. A sample publicity plan appears in Section 9. Below are standard approaches to publicity. You should commit only to those approaches that are feasible for your organization.

### **Flyers**

Flyers can be handed out on the street, mailed, left on literature tables put under car windshield wipers, etc. They are also of the cheapest forms of advertising.

## **Flyer printing**

Flyers are *printed* or *photocopied*. Costs may vary greatly. Look up a half dozen printing and copying businesses in your community and call around for the best price. Try bargaining with the business by telling them a competitor's price and asking if they can underbid it. See the *Yellow Pages* under "Printing and Copying." Be careful not to print too many. Unless there is a friendly business that will pay for the flyers, it is better to have small runs that can be fully distributed.

Printing is usually cheaper for large runs (say 1000+ copies), but such runs can take longer to schedule. Printing produces clearer and sharper images, especially for photos. Before using a printer ask to see examples of their recent work. (Be sure when you pick up materials from the printer that they are completely dry before handling).

Anticipate that a print job may require up to five business days. Copying businesses are faster, and often cheaper if you do not demand overnight service. In a community with a large college population all printing and copying businesses will be swamped from late August to early September, and again in mid-January to mid-February.

## **Flyer design**

Here are design tips for flyers:

- Make sure the flyer includes *the name of the event* (which should summarize what it is about), *where it will be held*, *the day and date*, *time it starts and finishes*, and *the main speaker*). Also include *contact information* for your group, including phone, fax, mailing address, e-mail or web site if available.
- Use as few words as possible to describe the event. Avoid using too many columns or text boxes, which clutter up the page. It's OK to leave blank space on the page. Most people will glance at a flyer for only a second or two before deciding whether to read it or throw it away. While the issues are complex, it is still usually possible to get the main idea into a few words.
- Use 8 ½" X 11" or 4 ¼" X 5 ½" paper for the flyer. Information can be printed on both sides, but make sure all the important material is together on the first page.
- Avoid jargon, unfamiliar acronyms, or abstract words. Most of the people who will read the flyer will not be familiar with the issues, nor know what your group is about. Keep it simple and you will succeed in getting your point across.
- Use a graphic. Marijuana legalization groups typically use the pot leaf icon. Make the image large enough to be seen from 30 feet away. Finding an appropriate image can be challenging. One possibility is a high quality photo of your main speaker, particularly if his or her face is well known.

## **Proof reading**

Careful proof reading saves money and embarrassment. All documents should be meticulously proofed by more than one person before printing or copying.

## **Distribution**

Distributing flyers can involve significant work, especially if waste is to be avoided. Here are some suggestions:

Other organizations: Co-sponsors usually will distribute flyers. Request a commitment on how many four or five weeks before your event. Deliver the flyers at least three weeks in advance. Follow-up calls will increase the likelihood of compliance.

Ask co-sponsors if they plan to do any major mailings before the event. If so, ask if they would include a flyer or small card. Churches make excellent co-sponsors. They may be willing to insert the flyers into the program for their services.

Community centers, supermarkets, libraries, and colleges often have places to leave a stack of flyers for people to pick up. While not the best way to distribute flyers, last minute leftovers can be put to use in this way.

*On the street:* Handing out flyers on the street is a labor-intensive, but effective, method of distribution. First check your local government's restrictions on this sort of activity. For example, it may be legal to hand out literature on the sidewalk, but not in the parks. There may be restrictions on how many volunteers can operate in a given area. Most cities and towns have ordinances forbidding obstruction of public walkways. Watch out for anti-littering laws as well. Someone at the local police department or city hall can answer these questions.

Storeowners may object to people standing outside their store handing out "pro-drug" or "legalization" literature. They may even call the police if you refuse to move, even though the law permits the activity. Even with the law on your side, discretion is the better part of valor and also avoids wasting time and energy. However, if harassed by local police for engaging in a legal activity, contact the nearest branch of the American Civil Liberties Union for assistance.

These problems are very rare. It is more likely that volunteers will fail to show up or work for only a short while because of boredom, discomfort, or frustration. "Flyering" requires patience. People on the street are in a hurry and do not want to be bothered. Some may refuse rudely. Warn your volunteers to avoid taking such reactions personally. Having members of the core group participate and perhaps buy the crew lunch or dinner afterwards can help maintain morale.

One way to increase the "take" rate is to use a "rap" or wear sandwich boards describing the event. PRDI volunteers have worn signs asking, "Sick of the drug war?" People who are interested will actually come up and ask for flyers.

Other places to distribute flyers (depending on the intended audience for the event) are factory gates, office buildings, railroad or subway stations, courthouses, registry of motor vehicles, and unemployment offices. It's important to work places where the targeted audience for the event can be found. Members of elite groups do not ordinarily frequent the places just mentioned.

Distributing flyers on car windshields. Check local regulations beforehand. Place the flyer so that the event title is visible. People do not like their cars used as advertising space, but if they see the event title first it may intrigue them. So as not to set off a car alarm, don't bump into the vehicle.

Estimates are that only one person will show up for every one hundred flyers distributed. However, many people will have read the flyer, raising public awareness.

### **Important points on flyers**

- It is best to have a supervisor arrange to have volunteers work in the same area at roughly the same time (efficient and good for morale). *Make sure that the supervisor is at the agreed meeting place on time.* Most volunteers arrive up to half an hour late, so the supervisor should wait at the meeting place for at least that long.
- Avoid debates and arguments with the public. While a volunteer may want to give people more information and present his or her views, the *event* is the activity designed to win people over. Volunteers or passers by who wish to discuss issues should be informed, politely but firmly, that there is work to do and advised to attend the event. Interactions with hecklers should be terminated as quickly as possible.
- Present a good image. Encourage volunteers to dress neatly, smile, and remain polite whatever the provocation.

### **Posters**

Posters and flyers are often identical except for size, and except that the text is printed on only one side of a poster. The same basic information must appear on the poster:

- the name of the event
- the place of the event
- the date and time of the event
- the speaker (and possibly the panelists as well)
- the organizers
- contact information for your group

Large posters require large print for readability. However, large posters are very expensive. Make sure you really need them, and have a place to hang them (such as the window of a friendly business), where they won't be torn down or vandalized.

Smaller posters (8 ½" X 11" or 8 ½" X 14") are much cheaper, especially if a non-glossy, recycled paper is used, and are easier to hang. Check into local ordinances on public poster display. If laws in your community permit, place them along pedestrian routes on telephone polls, bus stop shelters, walls or windows of unused buildings, laundry rooms of apartment complexes, on bulletin boards in supermarkets, community centers, bars/music clubs, record stores, etc. Ask co-sponsors to hang posters in their offices or facilities.

To be effective, posters must be up for at least seven full days. Ideally they should go up three weeks before the event, and be refreshed as necessary every week and the day before the event.

### **Information tables**

Information tables can both promote an event and at the same time recruit new members and volunteers. A basic tabling set-up requires the following:

- 1 folding table (try to find one which is 5-6 feet long, and not too heavy)
- 2-3 folding chairs
- Literature holders (which are cheap and can be found at a stationary store, otherwise paperweights)
- Literature (event flyers, organizational brochures, membership forms, newsletters, etc)
- Volunteer/ mailing list cards or notebook
- Extra pens
- Banner (if you've got one. You can get a one professionally printed for about \$100)

Place the table along a well-used pedestrian walkway during a time when people are about. The Motor Vehicles office is a good site, but requires advanced planning. Table space is usually free at local flea markets, community fairs, etc. Shopping malls may be amenable if approached in advance. Expect resistance in some malls (even if you are in a state where the courts have defined malls as public space). Observe local laws on obstructing public walkway as well.

Set up tables in places likely to be frequented by the kind of people you want to attend the event. It is easy to recruit volunteers to man tables, but always keep at least one person present who knows the issues and the organization.

### **Mailings**

A *direct mailing* is an excellent, if somewhat expensive, means of publicity. This may not be an option if your group is newly formed and lacks a mailing list. If there is money for postage, send either a flyer or a brief letter describing the topic of the forum and where and when it will be held. If the timing is right, send the announcement out with a newsletter, should you have one. Sending a postcard is less expensive than mailing a flyer or letter.

A bulk mailing permit can substantially lower postage costs, but may require several months to obtain. Bulk mailings can incur large fees, and delivery time may take three or four weeks. For a large effort bulk mail may be still worth exploring. Application forms and additional information are available at the main U.S. Post Office in your area. Mailings should be received a week to ten days before the event.

## **Listings**

Event listings require advanced planning, but are reasonably effective and free. Two months before the event, call local newspapers, magazines, and TV stations (including the local cable access station). Most will have a community calendar section where the event title, subject, time and place can be listed. Each media outlet has somewhat different requirements and deadlines for submitting events for the calendar. Letters requesting the listing can be faxed or mailed on a single occasion.

## **Public Service Announcements on Local Stations**

Some stations may not accept PSA requests from not-for-profit organizations. Try anyway. They may not ask about your status. Most stations require requests at least four weeks notice. Call ahead for each station's guidelines and deadlines two months before the event.

PSAs typically last 30 or 60 seconds. Some stations accept a tape provided by the organization, while others have their announcers read the message. It's better to use the station's professional announcers. Provide a script with the vital information on the event (*what it is, title, time and place, and the name and phone number of your organization*). Read the text aloud and time it before sending it to the station. An overly long announcement may not be used. Section 9 includes a sample PRDI radio PSA.

## **Internet/World Wide Web**

The Internet and World Wide Web are powerful supplements to other publicity efforts. If the group has internet access it can be used as following:

### *Usenet newsgroups*

The Internet offers thousands of public discussion groups read by hundreds of thousands of people. There are many groups on drugs, criminal justice, drug policy reform, and public health. Posting an announcement to newsgroups matching the forum topic should reach some readers in your area. Send the announcement to a dozen or so newsgroups with a follow-up message a week or two before the event. You may be unable to post your announcement to more than 2 or 3 newsgroups at a time, as the system has built-in protections against "cross-posting."



### *Mailing lists of other organizations*

Many drug policy reform organizations maintain e-mail mailing lists of their members. Some co-sponsors may also have such lists. Leave enough lead-time (3-4 weeks) when distributing your announcement.

### *Web sites*

If you and/or your co-sponsors have a web site, post copies of the flyer on the World Wide Web. Other organizations whose members would be interested in the topic might also be willing to put an announcement on their sites.

### *Where to get help*

In addition to PRDI, ask the Drug Reform Coordination Network (DRCNet) for advice on using the Internet for political action and publicity. DRCNet, the premier Internet-based drug policy reform organization in the nation, publishes the monthly “Reformer’s Calendar” listing up-coming drug policy reform events. DRCNet also maintains a large mailing list and several discussion groups. Call them at (202) 362-0030 or access their web site at <http://www.drcnet.org>.

### *On “Spamming”*

Mass distribution of unsolicited e-mail is called *spamming*. It can be tempting because it allows you to send e-mails to millions of people at a minimal cost. Unfortunately, it will **not** bring people to your forum and will ruin your credibility on-line.

### **Advertising**

Few new groups can afford the luxury of paid advertising, especially on TV. If your group does have resources, here are some tips for successful use:

- Study each media outlet. Does its audience include the sort of people you want to attend the event? Will it reach opinion-makers the forum ultimately seeks to influence?
- Is the image of the outlet compatible with that of your organization? Select media outlets that are respected and draw large audiences.
- Local newspapers and weeklies are the best bet for paid advertising. Run ads in a paper whose readers live and work locally and which covers news events there. Small circulation local papers are cheaper and often willing to help you design and place the ad. Be sure the ad says what you want.
- If possible use a picture or other graphic image in the ad. If the speaker is well known, highlight the name and use his or her picture. This attracts attention.
- If you can’t afford graphics, ask the paper for a *double-column* ad. This runs across two columns and is more eye-catching than one running down a narrow

single column.

- Put your ad in the edition coming out 2 or 3 days before the event. If the forum is early in the week, try to get the ad run on the previous Friday. This may mean getting it to the paper a week or two earlier, so be sure to check on the deadline.
- If you have time, read up on advertising at the local library. The reference librarian can help you find a book that is not excessively technical.

## **6. Working with the media**

Politics and the media are inseparable. Public relations is the art of creating and maintaining a favorable image of an organization, its issues and its activities:

- Effective public relations establish an organization's public profile, and ensure that profile lends credibility and influence.
- Media coverage of events shapes public opinion. It informs the community that a group is active and working to shape public awareness and beliefs.
- Regular coverage contributes significantly to organizational development by attracting members and volunteers and increasing attendance at events.
- Good media coverage builds morale and self-confidence of the core group and regular members.

### **Choosing a spokesperson**

Select a spokesperson before soliciting media attention for your organization. A highly involved member of your core group who is well versed in the issues and intimately involved in the organization's activities is a likely choice. Ability to think on one's feet is important, especially when responding to unanticipated questions from reporters or audience.

If no one in the core group is comfortable with being on camera or interviewed, recruit a new person to take on these duties. Since it may not be possible to train the spokesperson(s), it's important to consider personal appearance, literacy, fluency on the issues, and quality of presentation (tone, speaking voice, language, etc). Staff or officers can prepare briefing packets for the spokesperson as necessary.

The person representing your organization should have a formal position in its leadership. Press Officer, Director of Public Relations, President, Executive Director, Vice-President, or Associate Director are titles that lend credibility.

### **Giving interviews**

Here are tips on being interviewed:

- Prepare ahead of time. Decide on the main point you want to make. Brush up on relevant facts. Think through your presentation to make sure it is logical and clear. Develop a few "sound-bites" summing up the main point. If possible, get a list of questions in advance or try to anticipate them.

- Make one main point and be brief. A sound bite on TV or radio may only be 5 to 15 seconds long. A newspaper may only use one or two sentences. Make the best use of your time.
- Rehearse if you can. Trying to appear “spontaneous” is rarely convincing. It’s OK to use notes when not on camera.
- Be on guard. Even a reporter trying to be fair may still misrepresent you and your views. Remember that *nothing* is ever safely “off the record.” Do *not* talk about subjects you do not want to show up in the story. It is usually OK to say “no comment” or that you aren’t prepared to discuss an item. Alternatively, you can offer to get back with an answer once you have more information.
- Journalists want newsworthy material and may try to goad you into overstating your case. Stay calm and think before you speak. Reporters’ need for good quotes can work to your advantage. By offering new bits of evidence, creative arguments, or announcements of new support, you can catch their attention.
- Usually avoid mentioning the other side. The interview is your time, don’t waste it by attacking *them*. The opposition already gets plenty of press. Spend this time communicating your information and arguments, making your case, and promoting your organization.

Other tips for media appearances include:

- Dress and groom yourself properly.
- Focus on the needs of your audience. Give people reasons to support your views. Be clear how your proposals will benefit them.
- Review media appearances. Get copies of radio and TV interviews and go over them with other people. Improve your body language, coordinate your face, body and voice for maximum effect. Practice!
- Avoid negatives. Sarcasm, bitterness, and personal attacks can undermine and distract from your message as well as turn people against you. Remember that the audience may not perceive your opponents’ errors or hypocrisy.
- Select your main point and arguments carefully. Use only what can be communicated clearly and easily substantiated.

### **Developing relationships with local reporters**

Create a *press list* as the first step in setting up a public relations program. The list is a database of the print and broadcast (i.e. TV and radio) media with audiences in your area of operations. It should include: *contact name, organization, telephone and fax numbers, mailing address, e-mail, and notes (interests, political views, connections, articles or programs, etc.)* You can build your press list in several ways:

- You may already know the most important media in your area. Start a press list by looking up each of the major weekly and daily newspapers and radio and television stations. Also collect the names and contact information on reporters,

columnists, radio and TV show producers, and hosts who have an interest in drug or crime issues, or who cover community affairs, health, political, and/or social issues.

- Other members of your core group may belong to organizations that do press work of their own. A little diplomacy may elicit a copy of their press list. Obtain press lists from organizations that deal with drug and criminal justice issues related to your focus.
- PRDI can supply general press lists of major print, radio and TV media outlets for most communities in the United States. These can be helpful, but will not include names of local reporters, columnists, and TV/radio show producers.
- Monitor local media for stories related to drug policy to get the names of media people interested in drug issues. When you see such a story invite the reporter to be on your press list.
- Some companies publish *media directories* of all the media outlets in a given area including contact information. Among the better directories are *Bacon's TV/cable and Radio Directories (1-800-621-0561)* and *Publicity Outlets*, presently covering only New York City and the state of California (**1-800-999-8448**). The public relations departments of local non-profit or political organizations can guide you on directories. They may even donate to you 6 month or year old directories that are almost as good as (expensive) new directories.
- Another source is the media section of the Yahoo! web search engine (**www.yahoo.com**), which lists media outlets broken down by type of media and geographic area. While not complete, this web site provides much useful information.
- Contact local media to determine which reporters are most likely to be assigned to your events. Add them to your press list.

### **Making contact**

Personal contact ensures the best media coverage. Telephone persons on the media list. Inform them briefly about your organization's program and membership. Invite them to be on your mailing list.

Find ways to extend the initial contact. Media people are often interested in drug policy issues and enjoy the opportunity to discuss them personally. You can cultivate these relationships in several ways. Meet for coffee or dinner (media people usually pick up the check to avoid the appearance of inappropriate influence). Keep track of reporters' work, and telephone to give them feedback on their stories. Call occasionally to report on current activities, possible story ideas, and upcoming events. Save your best contacts, tips, exclusives, and story ideas for reporters who have given you favorable press. Always make sure your information is accurate.

## **Preparing a press advisory/press release**

A *press advisory* is an informational bulletin distributed *prior* to your event. It serves to inform the media about an upcoming event and to elicit interest in covering it. A *press release* is an informational bulletin distributed *after* your event or responding to a news item related to your issues.

Good press advisories or releases:

- Tell *who, what, when, where, why, and how*
- Get to the point immediately
- Emphasize the things that make your event newsworthy
- Do not waste words (try for one page, double-spaced if possible)
- Provide facts that are honest and accurate
- End at the right place
- Are written professionally with proper grammar and punctuation
- Often tell a human interest story, giving media a “hook”

Short “action” headlines help catch the attention of readers of releases and advisories. Reinforce headlines with short sub-headlines.

Begin the first paragraph with the most interesting and important information. Use the *inverted pyramid* style of writing, putting all the critical information early (always answer *who, what, when, where, why, and how* in the first or second paragraphs). Add information in descending order of importance, with the least critical information in the last paragraph.

### **Tips on writing press advisories and releases:**

- Place quotes from individuals in paragraphs covering them.
- Write declarative sentences using active rather than passive voice (“Citizens for Drug Policy Reform held a community forum last night,” rather than, “a community forum was held by Citizens for Drug Policy Reform last night.”)
- Keep sentence length to 16-20 words and paragraph length to four or five lines.
- Use the full name and title of an individual the first time he or she is mentioned (helps lend credibility to the story).
- Use bold face to highlight one or two important names or details.
- Have two or three people proofread the document. Then proofread it again. Typos and factual errors can severely damage the credibility of your release.
- Use 8 ½ by 11-inch paper, double-spaced. For special events you may want to use resumé quality paper.
- Use letterhead only for the first page.
- In the upper left hand corner of the first page provide the name of at least one contact plus phone numbers for regular and after hours.

- In the upper right hand corner, indicate *For Immediate Release* or release on a specified date.
- Start the copy at least three spaces below the headline and use wide margins on both sides to give the editor space to insert instructions to the copy editor or reporter. (This is also the reason for double spacing.)
- Indent paragraphs.
- Don't hyphenate words at the end of a line or break sentences between two pages.
- When there is than one page, center and type "**More**" at the bottom of the page.
- Number additional pages.
- At the conclusion of the document, center and type three number signs (###) or the word "**End.**"
- Staple pages in the upper left-hand corner. Do not use paper clips.
- Send clean originals or good quality photocopies.

Advisories and releases can make an event more newsworthy in many ways. Some possible themes include:

- Community leaders and/or well-known personalities will be present.
- A large number of people will attend.
- The event ties into other events that the media is already covering.

Section 9 includes an example of a press advisory in standard professional format. Advisories using idiosyncratic formats are less likely to be read.

### **How to prepare a press kit**

A *press kit* is a packet of information for media representatives who attend your event in person. It provides detailed background information most of which will not actually end up in a story. Press kits should contain the press advisory, materials from the forum (program, flyer, bios of the speaker, panelists, and moderator), a brochure about your organization, camera-ready press photos of the participants (if you can get them), and a telephone number or e-mail address for further information or comment. Use a high-quality, duotang folder to hold these materials.

Other tips for dealing with the media:

- To avoid confusion and resentment do not send releases to more than one department in a media outlet.
- Leave plenty of time to prepare mailing labels, print releases, stuff envelopes.
- Return calls to reporters immediately, as they may be on a tight deadline.
- Always tell the truth. If you don't know the answer to a question, admit it and offer to get back later.
- Your story may not be published (the editor's choice, not the reporter's). If a pattern develops that your organization or its events are not being covered,

request a meeting with the editor or producer to discuss the reason.

- Do not be upset if the story is edited, shortened or placed on a back page. Work harder to warrant better coverage in the future. Abusing reporters or editors for poor coverage will not achieve better coverage in the future.
- Investigate all possible means for getting your story in print or on the air. In addition to mainstream daily newspapers and television stations, look into weekly newspapers, special interest newspapers, other organization's newsletters, cable access TV programs, and local talk radio shows.
- Send a letter or note of appreciation to reporters who write about you, particularly if they write a good piece. Compliment them on aspects of their story that you found particularly good.

## **7. Running the event**

The two major objectives in organizing a public meeting are to generate a satisfactorily large audience and to make sure the audience finds the event rewarding. (Desired audience size of course depends on the location.) This requires thought and effort. To attract a smaller, elite audience of selected opinion leaders requires the same, but also the right connections.

There are two ways to get large audiences. Nail down a *big name speaker* or *address a local issue important to the people you want to attend*. The event program and flyer in Section 9 at the end of this handbook will give you a sense of how we used (or did not use) these two elements. Our most successful forums effectively combined a big name and a local issue.

### **Specific objectives of an event**

Here some of the specific objectives PRDI set in previous forums:

- Generate an audience of at least 350 people
- Use press and publicity not only to promote the event, but also to raise the visibility of drug policy reform in the community
- Invite panelists who will educate one another about new issues and ideas during the forum
- Get the audience to fill in volunteer/ mailing list cards to enlarge PRDI's "people power"

### **Dates and times**

The timing of a forum is crucial. Here are some suggestions:

- Bad times to hold forums include: 2-3 weeks before and after major holidays; before a long weekend; Friday or Saturday nights; in conflict with a major national or local event, such as the Super Bowl or elections; and during business hours.

- Before finalizing a date make sure that there is no conflicting event or television special that would attract your particular audience..
- Wednesday and Thursday nights, starting at 7:00 or 7:30PM, are usually good times. Before 7:00 is too early.

### **Booking a venue**

The following questions should be answered before beginning the search for a venue:

- *How many* people do you expect?
- How *much* can you afford to rent a venue?
- *What time* will the meeting start and finish?
- *Where* will people come from and by what mode(s) of transportation?
- *Does the venue have the right image?* (Does it increase the event's respectability and prestige?)

The ideal venue is well known, accessible, small enough for you to have a full house, but large enough to hold the anticipated audience. It should have its own PA system.

A small room *full* of people is better than a large room with the same number of people. Be conservative in estimating potential audience size and look for a venue that will hold that audience.

Here are general categories of venues:

- Churches
- Community centers
- Local schools
- Public libraries
- Elks, VFW's, and other social clubs
- Institutional non-profits such as Ethical Culture Societies or American Friends Service Committee
- Colleges and universities (if you can get a student organization to be an official co-sponsor)

Arranging a venue requires some paperwork and a fair amount of lead-time. Except for public venues such as community centers and public schools, venue owners can often be persuaded to co-sponsor your forum and donate the room rental fee. Start your search by determining where other non-profits and political groups hold public meetings. The local League of Women Voters may be able to suggest high quality venues.

Once you have compiled a list of possibilities, telephone whoever has the authority to book the hall. Tell this person the preferred date, the start and finish time (including time for set-up and clean up), what the meeting is about, and the



expected audience size. In addition to available dates, get answers to the following questions:

- Rental cost, plus any associated fees
- Whether a cash deposit is required
- Whether volunteer ushers are allowed and whether house staff must be hired for any duties
- What time your people can enter to set-up
- Whether keys will be provided or someone will open the door
- When everyone must be out
- Whether there are special restrictions on food, smoking, or video and audio recording
- Whether or not the hall has a PA system and, if not, locations of appropriate power outlets

Record this information for each possible venue. If possible, visit before committing. Avoid run-down buildings, an important reason to check them in person. If the venue is free, you might be more flexible.

When visiting the venue, try to meet with the person responsible for maintenance. Establish a friendly relationship with this person if possible. Check lighting, seating, bathrooms, and tables (for the information desk and for the panelists). A school or college may have only desk-chairs, unsuitable for your audience. Ask if there are any standard folding chairs that you might use instead. Check to make sure that heating or air conditioning is adequate for the expected weather conditions. If the hall does not have AC, ask whether the building gets too hot and if they have fans.

If possible, have a waiting room for your participants (often called a *green room*). It should be a room where they can sit comfortably, eat and drink, and safely leave their coats and belongings. Any small, furnished room can be prepared for this purpose.

Once the venue has been set, send a letter to whoever controls it, even if you have been told this is unnecessary. Include in the letter the arrangements you have worked out over the phone and keep a copy for your records. If there is a standard contract read it carefully, especially to see whether your organization is liable for the cost of damage or cancellation. The leadership group should read this agreement before it is signed.

### **Speaker and panelists**

The featured speaker should draw audience and media coverage. PRDI can help identify and contact potential speakers and panelists. When looking for speakers on your own, start with those who live in or near your community, or who travel frequently to your area. Local television and news anchors make good candidates to be speakers (and moderators).

The panel of three to five experts should reflect diverse professional background and political opinion. PRDI publishes for the media a directory of experts on various drug and criminal justice issues. This can serve as a starting point. Local professors, heads of non-profit organizations, and leaders in the legal and medical community also make good panelists.

### **Moderators**

Large public events require a good moderator. The best moderators can facilitate discussion between the speakers and panelists, deal coolly and firmly with annoying or disruptive people, and not hog the microphone themselves.

Moderators must maintain an attitude of strict neutrality. People unable or unwilling to be a speaker or panelist can make excellent moderators. The forum represents an opportunity to expose the moderator person to a range of views on drug policy, yet allow them to remain publicly uncommitted. In our experience moderators with little prior interest in drug policy reform became involved after participating in a PRDI forum.

Major media figures (such as the top news anchor of a local TV station), prominent judges, or well-known politicians make desirable moderators. A sufficiently prominent moderator also promotes attendance. Make it clear that he or she is not expected to take a position on the topic, and that participating does not constitute an endorsement of your organization's positions. If such a person cannot be found, look for someone with known skills as a moderator.

### **Ushers and event staff**

Some venues supply staff, but you may need your own volunteer ushers and staff. The number depends on projected attendance. For a typical audience of 350 PRDI has ten or twelve people on hand.

Have key members of your group perform the following functions: *press greeter*, *moderator's assistant*, *sound/lighting monitor*, and *spokesperson* (usually the same person who meets and greets the speakers and panelists).

Ushers greet and seat audience members, hand out programs, question cards and volunteer/ mailing list cards. During the event they carry question cards from the audience to the moderator's assistant. If an open mike is used, ushers make sure no one monopolizes it. As the audience leaves, ushers solicit volunteer/ mailing list cards. After the event they help clean up the hall and put away chairs and equipment.

### **Event programs**

A sample event program is provided in Section 9. A program can be produced with any standard word processing or desktop publishing computer program. Keep leftover programs to promote future events and to distribute to potential members and other supporters.

## **Setting up the venue**

The event staff should arrive about two hours early. They should check the set up of sound and video equipment, dias platform if any, as well as chairs, table for panelists, water and glasses, and podium for speakers. They should greet participants before the forum begins and offer them food and beverages in the “green room.” The event checklist in Section 8 covers the main items to attend to immediately before the program begins.

## **Information tables**

You should set up an information table at your forum. Staff it with one or two people who can answer questions about your organization. Add the organization’s brochures, membership and volunteer/ mailing list cards, copies of the newsletter, flyers for future events, and anything else appropriate to give away or sell. Co-sponsors may also want to distribute literature.

Sometimes speakers and panelists want to promote books. You can arrange for a local bookstore to bring books for signing and sale after the forum.

PRDI can supply limited amounts of literature for distribution and can also help find materials matching the topic of your forum.

## **Mailing lists and volunteer cards**

A forum can expand your mailing list and enlist new volunteers. Distribute volunteer/ mailing list cards with the program and ask your moderator to remind the audience to fill them out. The mailing list can be used to promote later forums, solicit funds or memberships, and, if you include the question, inform you about which publicity techniques worked best.

PRDI’s volunteer/ mailing list card is reproduced in Section 9. Design your own to collect the information you want about your audience.

## **Passing the hat**

Most grassroots groups pass the hat at public meetings to help cover the cost of the event. PRDI has not done this, as we seek to create an established institutional image. We do include a donation section on the volunteer/ mailing list card. Your group must decide whether to solicit funds from the audience. Check beforehand whether the venue in fact permits solicitation of funds.

## **Dealing with disruptive people**

Public forums *always* include audience members who are disruptive, off-topic, or long-winded. Controversial topics such as drug policy attract people who hope to use the event to bring attention to themselves or their issues. An adequate number of visible ushers (say two for every 100 people) and a strong moderator will

keep disruptions to a minimum. The question card format for audience questions also controls disruptions.

Here are some additional tips:

- The most likely disruption will come from an individual who launches into a lengthy off-topic preamble without seeming to get to a question. The moderator or an usher near the audience microphone should politely ask the person to get to the point and/or ask a question. In extreme cases unplug the microphone.
- Your moderator must control the situation should a speaker or panelist be heckled. If the heckler does not stop, have two or three staff approach and politely and calmly ask him or her to desist or leave.
- If the person is upset, allow him or her a chance to ventilate, but so as not interfere with the rest of the audience. Ask the person to speak privately with one of your core group members at the back of the room or outside.
- Always treat disruptive persons with respect. Audiences are quick to resent disrupters, but will also support that person's "free-speech rights" if the event staff or presenters appear cruel or heavy-handed.
- If all else fails, tell the person you will call the police and then do so if necessary. Drug policy reformers hesitate to resort to the police in these situations, especially when the disrupters oppose current policies. However, the audience has a right to hear the speakers, and dealing with such situations is a police job.

### **After the forum**

Don't forget the following important details after the forum:

- Send press releases to your press list (some might still write a story from your release, even if they did not send a reporter). Get back to any reporters you promised to contact or inform further. Look for news coverage and tape or clip it for your files.
- Send thank you notes to the forum participants, the owners of the venue, the media who covered it, and the co-sponsors.
- Do your accounting and pay your bills.
- Follow up useful contacts made at the event (press, potential core group members, funders, board members, etc).
- Conduct a postmortem on the event. Did it go well? What mistakes were made and learned from? Was it worthwhile? What were its pluses and minuses? Was the budget for the event exceeded? What could be done better next time? Where do you go from here?
- Enter names from your volunteer/ mailing list cards into your database.
- Celebrate a job well done with a dinner or party.

## **Postscript**

In joining with PRDI and undertaking the planning and staging of a forum, you assume significant responsibility. You are joining with many other people who demand open discussion and rational evaluation of public policy on drugs in general and the War on Drugs in particular. John Wesley spoke to us all when he advised, *“Whilst we live, let us live in earnest.”*

Be welcome.

## **8. Event checklist**

### **Assigning jobs**

- Locating and booking the venue
- Finding and confirming the speaker, moderators and panelists
- Writing the press advisory
- Creating the flyers, posters and other publicity
- Sending out PSA and listing letters
- Setting up the information table at the event
- Recruiting, orienting and supervising the ushers
- Managing the financial records

### **Booking speakers, moderator and panelists**

- Research candidates
- Call/send formal written invites to participate
- Receive their replies
- Send thank-you letters w/confirmation info

### **Booking a venue**

- Locate suitable venues
- Phone call to check on availability/costs
- Visit hall to check:
  - appearance and environment
  - chairs
  - handicap access
  - is platform needed for dias?
  - if you can set up table/hang things on the wall?
  - environmental control
  - toilets
  - what time you can get in
  - will venue provide ushers?
  - arrangements for cleaning up
- Send deposit if required
- Send and receive booking confirmation letters
- Pay site fee if required

## **Press outreach**

Press kits should include:

- Folders
- Your group's brochure and newsletter
- Event flyer
- Business card of press contact
- Speaker, moderator and panelist bios
- Event program
- Press advisories

## **For the night of the event**

Ushers

- Recruit volunteers
- Call 2-3 days before forum to confirm
- Have them arrive 1-2 hours early

Setting of the hall

- Print name tags for all participants
- Set up stage and table for speaker/panelists
  - Table cloth
  - Name signs for speaker/panelists
  - Podium and platform if needed
  - Microphones for panelists
  - Water and glasses
  - Your group's banner above and behind table
- Set aside seats for press and VIPS
- Set up audio/video recording equipment
- Set up information table
- Bring programs and other materials to be handed out
- Set up "green room" for participants
- Check that PA is working
- Put up signs for bathrooms

## **Afterwards**

- Send thank you letters to
  - Speakers
  - Panelists
  - Moderator
  - Venue
- Pay outstanding bills
- Return any borrowed equipment
- Meet to evaluate forum's success
- What is the next step?

## **9. Sample Forum Materials**

### **Sample Publicity Plan**

For this sample plan we used ranges of time for the deadlines, such as twelve weeks before the event. When you put your plan together you will put in specific dates. We also recommend that everyone in your group responsible for publicity use a daily planner or calendar to keep track of due dates.

<b><i>Time done by</i></b>	<b><i>What to do</i></b>
12 weeks	Select person “in charge” of publicity
12 weeks	Design event theme, title, and any graphic images to be used with the event
12 weeks	Prepare organization’s stationery/letterhead
12 weeks	Compile press list; update organization’s mailing lists
12 weeks	Draw up a list of potential co-sponsors to approach
12 weeks	Develop a draft pitch letter for your speaker and panelists
10 to 8 weeks	Approach co-sponsors about their deadlines to include an insert or listing in their newsletter.
6 weeks	Send pitch letter to local radio and TV show producers requesting on-air interviews for your speakers and panelists; make follow-up calls one week later to set up interviews
6 weeks	Begin preparing radio/TV PSA announcements
5 to 4 weeks	Release announcements to newspapers and radio/TV newsrooms (always give news media the story before you begin other publicity)
5 to 4 weeks	Mail publicity to your organization’s mailing list (letter, flyer, newsletter announcing the event)
5 to 4 weeks	Secure press-quality photos and biographies of the speaker, panelists, and moderator
5 weeks	Design oversize posters and decide where they will go
4 weeks	Leave a stack of flyers and/or make announcements at other organizations’ events (of course with their permission!)
4 to 3 weeks	Write confirming letters, enclosing fact sheet, for all scheduled radio/TV interviews with speakers and panelists; send fact sheet to program producer with a copy to your interviewee. Interviews should occur starting 10 days before your event
4 to 3 weeks	Depending on their deadlines, send public service announcements to radio/TV stations, and listings letters to calendar features of your local newspapers, magazines, and radio/TV stations

4 weeks	Deliver flyers to all co-sponsoring organizations for distribution
3 weeks	If volunteers are available, start distributing flyers at high-traffic locations
3 weeks	Start postering effort
2 weeks -10 days	Letter and return RSVP to press inviting them to attend the event. Make or send a confirming phone call or letter to those who respond
2 weeks	Find a photographer to cover the event (if the newspapers do not send reporters you may still get a story by sending a detailed press release with photos the next morning)
2 weeks	If volunteers are available, set up information tables at high traffic locations. If funds are available, send a reminder postcard to your mailing list
1 week	Fax final press advisory to newspapers and local wire services

### ***NIGHT OF THE EVENT***

Set aside car parking and seating for media; set up a table at the door for press to receive press packets and meet your organization's media representative

### ***DAY AFTER THE EVENT***

Send to newspapers that did not attend a press packet, press release, photos of the event, and/or copies of speeches

### ***WEEK AFTER THE EVENT***

Send thank-you letters to participants, co-sponsors, and the owners of the venue; clip and collect all news stories and mentions



## Sample invitation letter to co-sponsors

### **Partnership for Responsible Drug Information**

14 West 68 Street  
New York, NY 10019

Thomas H. Haines, Chair  
Executive Committee

Tel: 212 873 2982;  
Fax: 212 873 6125

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Victoria Olds, Chair

AND

**THE NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR**

**ETHICAL CULTURE**

Don R. Johnson, Leader

2 West 64 Street  
New York, NY 10022  
Tel: 212-871-3210

March 3, 1996

Dear:

Thank you for agreeing to consider cosponsoring the Three West Side Forums entitled "Towards a Compassionate and Cost-Effective Drug Policy." The forums will be held in the Ethical Culture auditorium at 2 West 64th Street. A draft of the flier is attached to this letter.

As a **Cosponsor** of these three forums we ask you to (1) add your name to the list of Cosponsors on our fliers announcing the events; (2) identify individual(s) to represent your institution at the forums, and (3) permit your representative to distribute fliers and otherwise publicize the events to your members and to interested parties.

Alternatively, especially if your institution requires a board meeting to make a Cosponsor decision, you might prefer to be a **Supporter**, in which case your name will not be on the flier. Whichever you choose, **please identify a member of your staff with their contact numbers (Tel/Fax) for coordination.** Once we receive your letter giving us the OK, we will deal with that staff member thereafter.

We have attached current information on the *programs* of the three forums, on the *speakers* and on the *panel members*.

Thank you for helping us get this important issue on the public agenda.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Victoria Olds, Chair

**The Social Service  
Board of the Society for  
ETHICAL CULTURE**

Don R. Johnson, Leader

**The New York Society  
for  
ETHICAL CULTURE**

Thomas H. Haines, Chair  
Executive Committee

**Partnership for Responsible  
Drug Information**

# Drugs and Prisons

... Is Justice in Jeopardy?



As special force teaming with

## Hugh Downs Co-anchoring ABC 20/20

- Presenters:** Steven Danziger -- Director, National Council on Crime Control  
Thomas Liddy -- Student, 12 1/2 years in prison under Rockefeller drug laws  
John Falicourt -- Face On, DuSable Family Center, Medgar Evers College  
Jennifer Papp -- Face On, The Federal Society
- Moderator:** Erin Stalling -- Face On, The Criminal Justice Policy Foundation

**Wednesday, May 14, 7-9 pm**

NY Center for Criminal Justice, 2 West 64th Street at CPW, New York

Special Permission of Executive Director, (212) 366-3924, NY Center for Criminal Justice

Sample Public Service Announcement

**TO:**  
**FROM:** Aaron D. Wilson, Assistant Director - PRDI  
**DATE:** April 16, 1997  
**RE:** Public Service Announcement copy

The following is the written copy for a 30 second PSA for our upcoming community forum:

On Wednesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, the Partnership for Responsible Drug Information will be sponsoring a public forum, "Drugs, Justice and Prisons." The featured speaker will be Hugh Downs, co-anchor of ABC-TV's "20/20".

He will be joined by a panel of experts to discuss the impact of the war on drugs on the criminal justice system, and on our community. There will be an opportunity for questions from the audience.

"Drugs, Justice and Prisons" will be held at the Ethical Culture Society, located at 2 West 64<sup>th</sup> Street. The forum is from 7:00 to 9:00pm, and is free and open to the public.

Sample question card

**QUESTION CARD**

**PLEASE USE BLOCK PRINT:**

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(OPTIONAL)

**DIRECT QUESTION TO:** \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

Sample press advisory



The Partnership for  
Responsible Drug Information

**PRESS ADVISORY**

**October 8, 1996**

**Contact: Gerry Migliore**

**Phone (212) 787-9881**

**Pager: 1-800-316-0663**

**EAST SIDE FORUM**

**The Drug War: Teens, Drugs and Guns  
Teenagers Join Experts to Evaluate Drug War**

*"...in any war, the first casualty is common sense, and the second is free and open discussion..." James Reston, New York Times, 1965.*

On Thursday, October 17, from 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., The Partnership for Responsible Drug Information and All Souls Unitarian Church, 80th Street and Lexington Avenue, will host a forum on the Drug War: Common Sense and Human Rights.

**Professor Alfred Blumstein** of the Heinz School of Public Policy at Carnegie Mellon University will be joined by young people and a group of experts. They will evaluate the teen drug crisis and the drug policies pursued by President Clinton and criticized by Bob Dole. Professor Blumstein has a long career of conducting research and providing policy advice on the criminal justice system; his opinions are frequently cited in the New York Times and other media. His areas of expertise include crime and drug use, prison and drugs, sentencing policies and practices, racial disparities in sentencing; violence and youth involvement in the illegal drug markets.

The experts include **Joel Brown, Ph.D.** of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, Berkeley, CA. He will discuss his research demonstrating the failure of the D.A.R.E. program, the largest federally-funded anti-drug education in the country. **Lynn Zimmer, Ph.D.**, Professor of Sociology at Queens College, is the author of numerous articles on drugs and drug policy. Her latest work, with co-author John Morgan, Ph.D., entitled *Marijuana Myths Marijuana Facts*, discusses marijuana use among youth. **Eddie Ellis, Esq.** is a youth counselor and Director of the Neighborhood Defender Services of Harlem.

The Partnership for Responsible Drug Information can be contacted at 14 West 68 Street, New York, NY 10023-6031, Tel: (212) 362-1964, Fax: (212) 721-9557, or by e-mail at [adw7@columbia.edu](mailto:adw7@columbia.edu).

###

***Truth in Government:  
Drugs, AIDS and the CIA***

Second Forum on

**The Drug War**

**Common Sense & Human Rights**

*Thursday Evening November 14, 1996, 7:00 to 9:00 PM*

*The Unitarian Church of All Souls  
80th and Lexington*

*Speaker*

**JOYCELYN ELDERS, M.D.**

*Panelists*

**DAN BAUM**

**DAWN DAY, PH.D.**

**ALFRED W. MCCOY, PH.D**

*Moderator*

**LEONARD M. MARKS, ESQ.**



**Joycelyn Elders, M.D.** is Professor of Pediatric Endocrinology at the University of Arkansas Medical School, a position

she has held for some thirty years. From 1987 to 1993, she served as Director of Arkansas Public Health under then-Governor Clinton. During that period, she fought to expand and extend Arkansas health services to impoverished rural communities. A particularly innovative and controversial proposal was to establish clinics at public schools to provide services to children with no other access to health care. Controversial, because the clinics would provide with parents' permission sex education and contraceptives to teenagers. In 1993, Dr. Elders came to Washington D.C. as Surgeon General, from which position she continued to campaign for public health measures. A passing comment, in response to a question, that legalization of drugs "perhaps...ought to be studied" led to her dismissal in 1994. This summer, the New York Civil Liberties Union awarded Dr. Elders its 1996 Callaway Civil Liberties Award. Dr. Elders has just published her autobiography, *Joycelyn Elders M.D.*

Former *Wall Street Journal* reporter **Dan Baum** is the author of *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure* (1996). The book chronicles the drug war from its development as a weapon against President Nixon's political opponents, through the closing of drug policy debate during the Carter Administration, to the war's greatest

escalation ever under President Clinton. Says Baum, "We've all been fooled into believing the War on Drugs is about protecting our public health from the most grievous threat imaginable—that it is necessary and that it is the only correct approach to the problem."

**Dawn Day, Ph.D.** is Director of the Dogwood Center, an independent research organization in Princeton, New Jersey. Her just-released report, *Health Emergency 1997: The Spread of Drug-Related AIDS Among African Americans and Latinos*, shows how African Americans and Latinos face a far higher risk of drug-related AIDS: *four times higher for African Americans, and one and a half times for Latinos.*

**Alfred W. McCoy, Ph.D.**, is professor of Southeast Asian history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 1991, he published *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, an updated version of his 1972 classic study of the same title. As Professor McCoy has revealed, since World War II involvement in international heroin and cocaine trafficking has been an integral part of the CIA's efforts to maintain U.S. power abroad.

Early in his thirty-year career as a trial attorney, **Leonard M. Marks, Esq.** prosecuted drug cases. In 1975, he was a consultant to the Watergate Special Prosecutor's office. His present clients include entertainers and public interest organizations, such as the NAACP, the Coalition for the Homeless, and Friends of the Earth. Mr. Marks has produced a number of documentaries for PBS.

## **PROGRAM**

### *Welcome from All Souls*

**C. WILLIAM BECHMAN**

Past President, All Souls Congregation  
Past Chair of All Souls AIDS Taskforce

### *Welcome from PRDI*

**POLLY CLEVELAND, Ph.D.**

Research Director, PRDI

### *Introduction of Speaker and Panelists*

**LEONARD M. MARKS, Esq.,**

Moderator

### **JOYCELYN ELDERS, M.D.**

"Government suppression of research on AIDS  
and needle-exchanges"

### **DAN BAUM**

"Government as intentional promoter of  
misinformation about drugs"

### **DAWN DAY, Ph.D.**

"Government responsibility for AIDS crisis  
among minorities"

### **ALFRED W. MCCOY, Ph.D.**

"CIA complicity in the global drug trade"

### *Written Questions from the Audience*

### *Open Microphone*

### *Summary and Statement of Appreciation*

**THOMAS H. HAINES, Ph.D.**

Chair, Executive Committee, PRDI

*Book signing, courtesy of Barnes & Noble*

## SPONSORS



**The Partnership  
for Responsible  
Drug Information**

(PRDI) is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization of professionals. PRDI seeks to legitimize open, honest, and well-informed discussion of alternatives to the drug war. At present, powerful political and ideological taboos obstruct recognition that between "prohibition" and "legalization" lies a vast range of intermediate policies, many already in practice in Europe and Australia. Discrediting taboos and encouraging discussion, PRDI works to enable the unconstrained democratic process to develop effective and humane drug policies.



*Members of All Souls  
Unitarian Church  
affirm and promote:*

*The inherent worth and dignity  
of every person*

*Justice, equity and compassion  
in human relations*

*A free and responsible search  
for truth and meaning*

*The right of conscience and the  
use of the democratic process  
within our congregations  
and in society at large;*

*The goal of world community  
with peace, liberty  
and justice for all.*

## CO-SPONSORS

*Agenda for Children Tomorrow  
Project*

*The American Ethical Union*

*Beth Israel Medical Center*

*Center for Community Alternatives*

*Charas El Bohio Cultural and  
Community Center*

*Church of St. Matthew & St. Timothy*

*Columbia School of Public Health*

*Congregation B'nai Jeshurun*

*The Correctional Association  
of New York*

*Doctors of the World*

*Fordham University School of Law*

*Public Interest Resource Center*

*The Fortune Society*

*The Freedom Foundation*

*Gay Men's Health Crisis*

*The Interfaith Assembly on Homeless-  
ness & Housing*

*Jan Hus Presbyterian Church*

*Judson Memorial Church*

*Montefiore Medical Center*

*New York Academy of Medicine*

*New York Society for Ethical Culture*

*New York Society for Ethical Culture,  
Social Service Board*

*New York Society for Prevention of  
Cruelty to Children*

*New York University Review of Law  
& Social Change*

*Odyssey House*

*Physicians for Human Rights*

*Physicians for Social Responsibility*

*Prison Life Magazine*

*Prisoners' Legal Services*

*Riverside Church*

*St. Clare's Hospital*

*St. Luke's/Roosevelt Hospital*

*Solid Ground: A Franciscan Ministry  
with African-American Families*

*Victim Services Agency*

*Women's Prison Association*

*West Side Federation of Block &  
Neighborhood Associations*



Sample volunteer/mailling list card

***I WOULD LIKE TO LEARN MORE OR HELP***

**PLEASE PRINT:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Last First M.I.

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone (day):** ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ **(eve):** ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

**E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax:** ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

*I want to promote honest, informed discussion of drug policy. I'll help as follows:*

- write letters to editors       debate/testify       help in the office  
 vidcotape       art/graphic design       do library research  
 organize meetings/seminars       host fund-raisers  
 harm reduction activities, namely \_\_\_\_\_  
**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_

*My organization (PTA, church, etc.) can invite experts to address drug issues.*

PRDI is organizing groups within several professions to promote discussion of drug policy, especially as it affects those particular professions. *I am interested in organizing within my profession, which is:*

- Law    Medicine    Business    Psychology  
 Science    Clergy   | | Government | | Other health profession  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

*I learned of this forum by* \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(continue on back)

Envelopes for the Partnership for Responsible Drug Information are available at the tables in the lobby.

I wish to contribute by    Check       Visa/Mastercard

If you check off Credit Card we will call for your card number.

**PLEASE RETURN THIS CARD AT THE END OF THE FORUM**  
**PRDI, 14 West 68 St, NY NY 10023; Pho: 362-1964; Fax: 721-9557**

## **10. Additional readings and resources**

Note: Many of these titles are out-of-print, but are available in large public and academic libraries.

*Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990's.* By Kandall Bobo and S. Max. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press (1991).

*Publicity for Volunteers: A Handbook.* By Virginia Bortin. New York: Walker and Company (1981).

*The Art of Coalition Building: A Guide for Community Leaders.* By Cherie R. Brown. American Jewish Committee.

*How to Win Friends and Influence People.* By Dale Carnegie. New York: Pocket Books (1981).

*Organizing Special Events and Conferences: A Practical Guide for Busy Volunteers and Staff.* By Darcey C. Devney. Pineapple Press (1993).

*Fundraising: Hands-On Tactics for Nonprofit Groups.* By Peter L. Edles. New York: McGraw Hill (1992).

*Rhetoric in the War on Drugs: The Triumphs and Tragedies of Public Relations.* By William N. Elwood. Westport, CT: Praeger (1994).

*Power Funding: Gaining Access to Power, Influence, and Money in Your Community.* By David Emenhiser. Fund Raising Institute (1992).

*The Grassroots Fundraising Book: How to Raise Money in Your Community.* By Joan Flanagan. Chicago: Contemporary Books (1982).

*War at Home: Covert Actions Against U.S. Activists.* By B. Glick. Boston: South End Press (1987).

*The Community Activist's Handbook: A Guide to Organizing, Financing, and Publicizing Community Campaigns.* By John Huenfeld. Boston: Beacon Press (1970).

*Organizing!: A Guide for Grassroots Activists.* By Si Kahn. Washington DC: NASW Press (1991).

*Fundraising for Social Change.* By Kim Klein. Chardon Press (1994).

*Repealing National Prohibition.* By David E. Kyvig. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press (1980). (Political history of how alcohol prohibition was repealed).

*Guerrilla P.R.: How You Can Wage an Effective Publicity Campaign... Without Going Broke.* By Michael Levine. New York: Harperbusiness (1994).

*The Guerilla Marketing Handbook.* By Jay Conrad Levinson & Seth Godin. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co. (1995) (There are several books in this series, look for the oversized one with the camouflage cover).

- How to Get Your Message Across: A Practical Guide to Power Communication.* By David Lewis. Souvenir Press Ltd. (1997).
- A Guide to Preparing Cost-Effective Press Releases.* By Robert H. Loeffler. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press (1992).
- Enough is Enough: The Hell-Raiser's Guide to Community Activism.* By Diane MacEachern. Avon Books (1994).
- Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* By Marshall McLuhan. New York: McGraw-Hill (1964).
- Organizing for Power and Empowerment.* By Jacqueline B. Mondros and Scott M. Wilson. New York: Columbia Univ. Press (1994).
- How to Support Your Cause and Win.* By Gerald M. Phillips. Columbia, SC: Univ. of S. Carolina Press (1984).
- Do-It-Yourself Publicity.* By David F. Ramacitti. AMACOM Press (1991).
- And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic.* By Randy Shilts. New York: St. Martin's Press (1995).
- Sam Smith's Great American Political Repair Manual.* By Sam Smith. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1997).
- How to Be an Effective Speaker.* By Cristina Stuart. National Textbook Co. Trade (1989).
- Successful Community Leadership: A Skills Guide for Volunteers and Professionals.* By John E. Tropman. Washington DC: NASW Press (1997)
- Organizing Things: A Guide to Successful Political Action.* By Sue Ward. London: Pluto Press (1984).

## **The Partnership for Responsible Drug Information**

14 West 68th Street  
New York, NY 10023  
(212) 362-1964  
fax (212) 362-3137  
email awilson@prdi.org

PRDI is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization of professionals. We work to enable the democratic process to develop effective and humane drug policies. To this end, we support open, honest, and well-informed discussion of alternatives to the drug war. We seek to increase public awareness that between “prohibition” and “legalization” lies a vast range of intermediate policies. Many of these are currently practiced in Europe, Canada and Australia, and at the local and state level in the United States. We neither lobby nor take a position on specific policies.

### **Publications, Reprints and Videos**

“Truth in government: Drugs, AIDS and the CIA,” with Joycelyn Elders, MD, Dan Baum, Dawn Day and Alfred McCoy. A half-hour video of PRDI’s 11/14/96 forum, produced by GlobalVision.

Wilson, Aaron, *The PRDI Drug Policy Resources Directory for the Media*. A directory of experts, indexed by topics of expertise, by name and by state. Plus a directory of drug policy-related websites. January 1998 (next edition September 1998).

“Towards a Compassionate and Cost-Effective Drug Policy: A Forum on the Impact of Drug Policy on the Justice System and Human Rights.” *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, Volume XXIV, Number 2, 1997. Transcript of April 11, 1996 PRDI forum at the New York Society for Ethical Culture. Honorable Robert Sweet, speaker, with Robert Gangi, Julie Stewart, Ernest Drucker, Carol Weiss, and Richard Stratton.

Committee on Drugs and the Law, “A Wiser Course: Ending Drug Prohibition,” *The Record of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York*, Volume 49, Number 5, June 1994, page 521. An exhaustively-documented 50 page report from one of the most prestigious bar associations in the US.

Torruella, Juan R., “One Judge’s Attempt at a Rational Discussion of the So-called ‘War on Drugs.’” Spotlight lecture at Colby College, Waterville, Maine, April 25, 1996, by the Chief Judge of the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

Evans, Richard, “The Voluntary Committee of Lawyers: Architects of Repeal,” 1996.