

ADVOCACY TOOLS

Engaging in advocacy doesn't have to be difficult; these tools can help you connect with your community and your elected officials. Utilize the following tips, templates, and examples and tailor them to fit your message and achieve your goal.

VIRTUAL EVENT PLANNING TIPS

As our nation continues to grapple with the unpredictability surrounding the COVID-19 health crisis, it is essential that Week Without Violence continues to have virtual options for participants. Several paid platforms -- like [GoToMeeting](#), [Mailchimp](#), [Google Hangouts](#), and others -- are offering free trials right now to nonprofits in response to COVID-19. [Zoom](#), for example, has a free option that will allow you to host a group of up to 100 for 40 minutes, and Adobe Connect is currently offering a free 90-day trial. For more information on accessing the free Adobe Connect trial, contact YWCA USA's IT Director, Matt Preiss, at mpreiss@ywca.org. Platforms like Zoom or Adobe Connect are available for hosting video conferences, some of which also have unique features conducive to building more engaging trainings. For example Zoom offers "[breakout rooms](#)" for participants to separate into small group discussions as well as [screen sharing](#) for workshop leaders to present PowerPoint and other multimedia. Please note, it is important to test any platform ahead of time and understand existing logistical limitations like whether there is a cap on the number of participants.

We encourage you to continue sharing your own ideas for virtual events within the new [Week Without Violence Community](#) on the intranet. If you have any questions about the suggestions below, would like to be connected to YWCAs already planning some of these strategies, or need additional help transitioning from in-person to virtual events, YWCA USA staff are available to assist you. Email weekwithoutviolence@ywca.org.

HOW TO HOST A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY FORUM

Community forums serve as opportunities to uplift the voices of women of color leaders and experts, to host critical discussions around issues impacting our communities, and to empower our communities with information, tools, and resources to end gender-based violence and racial violence and support survivors. Given the unpredictability surrounding COVID-19, advocates are still turning to virtual or online community forums to continue hosting these important discussions. A virtual community forum can take many forms -- for example, it can look like a webinar or briefing, a panel discussion or town hall, a learning session, a Q&A with experts or candidates, or a workshop. No matter what you call your event, or how you structure it, a virtual community forum can be an effective way for your YWCA to engage your community in Week Without Violence this year.

KEY BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

Benefits:

- Educate your community and policymakers on issues of importance to your community and your YWCA
- Deepen relationships with elected officials, sponsors, and partner organizations
- Fundraising opportunity through event sponsorship

Challenges:

- Heavier lift and time consuming to plan and manage
- Moderate to high level of technical sophistication
- Maintaining 501(c)(3) nonpartisanship

TIPS & TRICKS

GOALS

- **Setting goals for an event will enable you to measure success.** Consider setting numeric goals (i.e., audience turnout, funds raised, actions taken) as well as non-numeric goals (i.e., to educate the community about gender-based and racial violence, to raise awareness about Week Without Violence, to celebrate a local elected official signing the Week Without Violence Proclamation). For example, setting a goal to have 150 people to attend your virtual forum or have 50 people take action to support VAWA, provides a clear

statement of what you are trying to accomplish that can guide your planning decisions.

LOGISTICS

- **Type of event.** Will your forum be structured more as a webinar or briefing? A panel discussion or town hall? A learning session, Q&A, or workshop? The format depends, in part, on whether your goal is to educate or motivate. If your goal is to educate, a forum or panel discussion is an engaging way to provide information. A single-focused speaker or group of speakers,

or a screening of a video about gender-based and/or racial violence, allows for an emotional presentation that will motivate your audience. A virtual town hall allows community members to hear and share thoughts with community leaders. Potential speakers include experts in gender-based violence and racial trauma, YWCA staff, local or community leaders, local college or university professors, or elected officials.

➤ **Public or private.**

Determine whether you want your event to be open to the public, or to be a private affair. This also includes whether your event is open to the media.

➤ **Co-hosts/co-sponsors.** Hosting a virtual forum can be a heavy lift for your YWCA and working with another organization to co-host or co-sponsor your event offers several advantages, especially if you've never hosted a virtual event before. Collaboration provides a bigger pool for resources and potential attendees. It can also result in a more balanced or diverse perspective. Moreover, working with other organizations represents a great opportunity to build and maintain coalitions. If you do co-sponsor your event, make sure that you have the same goals.

➤ **Create an event description and secure your speakers.** Early in your planning process, develop a description of the forum that can be used when conducting your outreach to

potential speakers, sponsors, and partner organizations, and can later form the basis of your official event invitation.

- Make a list of who you'd like to speak at your forum and use the event description to invite them to participate.
- Remember that your speakers do not have to be national political figures or celebrities. Consider inviting direct

service staff, program participants, community leaders, local candidates for office, local news anchors, etc., to speak at your event and provide their diverse perspective.

➤ **Platform.** Choosing the right platform for your Week Without Violence virtual event depends on who you'd

like to attend and the environment you want to create. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How many attendees are you expecting?
- How will participants engage with the speaker?
- How many attendees are you expecting?
- How will participants engage with the speaker?
- How will participants engage with each other?
- What preparation do participants need in order to use the virtual platform?
- How will materials be shared with participants before, during, and after the sessions?

As you undertake your planning, make sure to center the voices and experiences of survivors and acknowledge that experiences vary based on gender, race, socio-economic status, sexual identity, and ability. Especially as we look to solutions for issues impacting survivors, it's important for us to listen to the wants and needs of those who are most directly impacted.

- What will your community norms be, and how much control do you want over their adherence?
- How can you build an agenda that balances content sharing, engagement, and time in front of a computer to keep participants engaged?

➤ **Design a promotional graphic for your forum.**

Design a graphic that you and your event partners can share to promote participation in your event, using free graphic design software like [Canva](#) to get started. Encourage your partners to share the promotional materials you've developed with their network of staff, followers, clients, supporters, etc.

➤ **Familiarize yourself with the platform and test in advance.** Ideally, you will host a training (or at least a run through) for your staff and event speakers on how to use the platform prior to your event. Consider also sending instructions for how to use the platform via email to your event attendees in advance of the event and have someone on hand who is especially familiar with the platform and can handle questions or troubleshoot during the event.

➤ **Set up a registration form for RSVPs.** While it's often easiest to set up an RSVP through

the platform you will be using for the event, you can also use free services such as [Eventbrite](#) or [Google Forms](#) to set up an event registration form. Just make sure to collect contact information (most likely, email addresses) from those who register to enable follow up communications about the event.

PUBLICITY

➤ **Know Your Audience.** Not every event is of interest to every audience. Before you develop your publicity plan, decide who you want to attend your event.

➤ **Personal or public.** If you are hosting a small private party, personal invitations are the only "publicity" you will need. These can take the form of phone calls, e-invites, or written notes.

○ If you are planning for a large audience, newsletters, email, Facebook events, and community event calendars can all prove useful. The personalized event page you receive when registering your event at [Week Without Violence](#) can also be incredibly useful in promoting your event.

➤ **Paid advertising.** If your YWCA has funds at its disposal, consider using paid advertising for event promotion. Knowing your intended audience will ensure that resources are targeted and well spent.

➤ **Know Your Event.** If you are hosting a large public event, make sure you have planned it

DON'T FORGET: Once you've determined logistics, return to your [Week Without Violence](#) account to register your event. Registered events will appear on our event map and will help us show the depth and breadth of support around the country for ending gender-based violence and declaring racism a public health crisis. Plus, all registered events receive a unique, customizable mini site (including a unique URL!) to use in event

to be interesting to the general public. What is unique about your event? Different angles will help you to catch the interest of potential attendees and the media who can help raise awareness about racial justice, gender-based violence, and your event.

- **Decide on your “look”.** All your materials should have a consistent theme and share similar design elements that highlight the message of your event. Make sure to include a link to your registration form. Consider using free graphic design software like [Canva](#) to design your own graphics or use these [YWCA template social media graphics](#) to get started.
- **The Five W’s:** In everything you produce — flyers, posters, e-invites, news alerts, event listings — you must have the correct 5 W’s:
 - Who will be speaking?
 - What will they be addressing?
 - When will it happen?
 - Where will it take place?
 - Why are you sponsoring the event?
- **Make Your PR Plan.** Having focused on your audience and your event, and designed your promotional materials, you are now ready to make your publicity plan. Calendarize all relevant deadlines, e.g., for publications, as well as “lead times” required for design and distribution of invitations.
- **Promote your event.** Consider promoting the event through your website, newsletter, social media, and email to community partners or coalition listservs, and encourage your event partners and sponsors to share the promotional materials with

their network, as well. If it makes sense in your community, consider printing the graphic and pinning it to community bulletin boards in places of business that remain open and frequented like grocery stores, coffee shops, and laundromats.

PRE-EVENT

- **Develop a run of show.** A run-of-show helps to ensure an organized and timely program. Share the goals of your event, discussion questions, and clear presentation requests with your speakers in advance of the event.
 - To prepare event support staff, make sure to designate roles ahead of time, *i.e.*, someone to: run the technology during the event, pass along audience-generated questions to the moderator, share information and resources via the chat, run any multimedia components, track the time, *etc.*
 - To prepare your speakers, consider including the questions your event moderator will ask within the run-of-show and send the run-of-show to speakers as far in advance as possible.
- **Send important details to participants.** In advance of the event, send detailed instructions for how to join the event and use the platform, as well as the contact information for someone who will serve as your “IT expert” to handle questions and troubleshoot as needed during the event.

THE EVENT

- **Introductions and opening remarks.** As your participants get settled, take the opportunity to welcome and thank them.

It's important to acknowledge the time and effort people make to show up — let them know it's appreciated.

- Introduce yourself — what YWCA is, what Week Without Violence is, and why you are holding an event — with a few brief comments reminding attendees of the importance of ending gender-based violence.
 - If you notice any local elected officials, community leaders, or other key individuals, introduce them and thank them for their attendance.
 - In your opening remarks, briefly explain the format of the event so that people know what to expect and how long they might be there. Also, inform participants how they can share questions, comments, or ideas they have during the presentation or to bring up during a group discussion, if applicable.
- **Presentation.** Follow your run-of-show to ensure an organized and timely program.
- **Group Discussion.** An important part of many events is the time when individuals can share ideas. Leave ample time for Q&A / group discussion and suggestions for individual action to follow the presentation.
- Have a few pre-planned topics or questions. If everyone seems to have something to contribute, you can scale back to focus on a few central points. On the other hand, you can use a question or idea as a way to elicit a response.
- Stick to a time limit. If you hit your time limit and there are still questions and responses, take one last question.
- **Take Action.** One of the most important parts of your event is encouraging your attendees to take action to end gender-based and racial violence, and support survivors.
- Invite your attendees to take action to [declare racism a public health crisis](#), end gender-based violence and support survivors. Some ideas include urging policymakers to cosponsor and pass the [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#) and the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act \(FVPSA\)](#) through letters, phone calls, or through [YWCA's Action Center](#).
- **Wrapping Up.** At the end of your event, it is a good idea to give a short concluding address.
- Thank everyone again for attending and be sure to remind them to sign up for the [YWCA Action Center](#) and to receive updates from you about future events and actions to end gender-based and racial violence, and support survivors.
 - This is also a good time to let people know about all the great work your YWCA has been doing and what is coming in the future.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **After the event, pull together your team.** Evaluate whether you achieved your goals and what you would do the same/differently next time. Celebrate a job well done!
- **Use your registration list.** The registration list from your event becomes one of your most valuable organizing tools. That list contains the names of people you already knew were inspired to become supporters of YWCA, someone you met whom you had not worked with before, a key leader in your community, or an organization you can ally with in the future. For your next event, invite them and ask them to bring a friend!
- **Follow up with your attendees.** Include a “call to action” in some way before too much time passes. If it was a small event, give everyone on your list a call or send an email or note. If you had a large event, choose a select number of people to contact. Tell attendees how glad you are that they participated and ask for feedback on the event. If you already have plans for another event, give them a heads-up and

ask if they will commit to being there.

YWCA USA would love to hear more about your event! Share livestreams and quotes from your event with us and we will elevate your work on social media and the YWCA USA website.

- **Week Without Violence and your event are powerful because they inspire people in your community.** You can share news about your event with your community, suggest ways that people can get involved in ending gender-based violence and supporting survivors in your community, and provide a way for them to get in touch with you. Send a letter-to-the-editor to your local newspaper.

REPORT BACK

- Don't forget to let YWCA USA know how your event went by filling out the report back form about your event on your dashboard. Your feedback helps us highlight the amazing work YWCAs are doing across the country!

SOME IMPORTANT RULES AROUND VOTER ENGAGEMENT



Should your YWCA be located in a state with off-year elections, the IRS clearly states that 501(c)(3) organizations may conduct voter engagement or connect with candidates on a nonpartisan basis. This includes encouraging voter participation, educating voters, and talking to candidates about issues. Below are guidelines for YWCAs in conducting activities during the 2019 election season.

As 501(c)(3) organizations, YWCAs can:

1. Promote or conduct voter registration
2. Educate voters on the where, when, and how of voting
3. Encourage and remind people to vote
4. Encourage staff to serve on Election Day as a poll worker, translator, or other nonpartisan volunteer
5. Distribute nonpartisan sample ballots, candidate questionnaires, or voter guides
6. Host or co-sponsor a candidate forum (the forum must be open to all candidates,

conducted in a balanced way, and include a nonpartisan panel of questioners)

Have more questions about the do's and don'ts for 501(c)(3)s? Check out [this webinar](#) or [this resource](#) from Nonprofit Vote. You can also call the Bolder Advocacy hotline at 866-NP-LOBBY (866-675-6229).

7. Hold a voter education event
8. Educate the candidates on your issues
9. Continue issue advocacy during an election
10. Support or oppose ballot measures as a lobbying activity (subject to normal lobbying limits)
11. Conduct nonpartisan training on issues and organizing skills
12. Allow staff to participate as individuals in political campaigns, on their own time and not as representatives of the organization

YWCAs may NOT conduct *partisan* activities to support or oppose any candidate for public office, including:

1. Endorsing a candidate
2. Contributing to a candidate or party. This includes “in-kind” contributions such as publicity, staff time, and use of facilities or assets, *unless* those resources are made equally available to all candidates at their fair market value
3. Rating candidates on who is most favorable to your issue(s)

For more information about YWCA's Voter Engagement and resources for 2020, please join the [Voter Engagement Intranet Community](#).

HOW TO HOST A VIRTUAL RACE

Virtual races are great way to raise awareness about your YWCA, the impact of gender-based violence and racial violence in your community in a safe, socially distanced way. Races can also be used as a fundraiser for your organization.

KEY BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

Benefits:

- Raise the profile of your YWCA in your community
- Deepen relationships with partner organizations
- Educate your community about gender-based and racial violence and its impact in your community
- Mobilize current & former program participants
- Mobilize community members who do not have with unreliable internet access
- Well-suited as a volunteer activity

Challenges:

- Potential costs associated with securing promotional items
- Moderate level of technical sophistication
- Managing participants and tracking progress

TIPS & TRICKS

PLAN YOUR RACE

➤ Details:

- Date: Choose a date during Week Without Violence that makes sense for your location. Or open up your race so that participants can join on any day that week.
- Distance: Determine what distance you will have participants run / walk. Common distances are 5k and 10k.

- **Set reasonable goals.** For instance, setting goals around the number of participants or the total amount fundraised will help keep you on track.

- **Safety First:** Safety is your number one priority for your race. Here are a few pointers:

- Remind your race participants about health and safety needs, such as social distancing guidelines, masks, and hand sanitizer.

TIP: Set reasonable goals. How many people do you want to register? It is better to be conservative with your goals so you can exceed expectations and grow next year!

➤ **Sponsorship:** Typically, a road race will cost the amount of money you are charging participants to register. However, a virtual race doesn't have many costs. If you wish to raise money for your YWCA's other projects to end gender-based and racial violence, and support survivors, finding a sponsor may help you cover the costs of your race:

- Go to networking events to meet people. Find out what they do — it might be relevant to your race.
- Post flyers when you're at community locations like supermarkets and banks. Promote your event to potential participants and sponsors at the same time.
- Contact local businesses and see if they want to donate money, be listed on promotional materials, or donate stuff for the race goodie bags.
- If you notice teams signing up for the event, approach them and see if they have a company that would like to participate in being a sponsor.
- Post a sponsorship packet on your website.

➤ **Publicity:** The internet is the best way to promote your event. Try promoting your event through email blasts, your website, and your social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). But don't forget advertising in local newspapers and going to other races can also gain additional registrations.

➤ **Registration:**

- Once race details have been confirmed, you need to offer a way to sign up. Cumbersome registrations can turn

people away. An online registration system available 24/7 allows racers to sign up at their convenience and saves you time. Tools like Eventbrite and Facebook are useful if you are keeping your race simple and are also great for publicizing your event.

- If your event is more about raising awareness than raising funds, you might decide to forego a formal registration. In this case, Eventbrite and Facebook are excellent tools for simply helping to get the word out about your event.

➤ **Design Race Day Shirts:** One way to mark your event AND to raise extra funds is to design and sell t-shirts and/or sweatshirts. This is a great way to raise money for your cause without charging a participation fee. Runners/walkers can simply purchase a shirt and then go out and run during Week Without Violence.

➤ **If you're pressed for time:** YWCA USA has [Week Without Violence merchandise](#) available in the merchandise store for purchase.

➤ **Make sure participants know where to upload their times.** Participants need to know where to send and/or post their race times once they finish their race so that you can determine race winners.

TIP: Be ready for participants to email you their compliments and complaints about their experiences as early as the day of the race. Remember to prepare your staff to respond appropriately to both.

RACE DAY / WEEK

- **It's time to run!** There are lots of ways to engage with your supporters during your race day / week and really form a community around the race, ending gender-based violence, and your YWCA. For instance:
 - Make a race playlist and share it with participants so they can listen while they run.
 - Share race updates through the day / week on social media. If you have any special guests participating, ask them to post live Instagram and/or Facebook stories showing themselves participating.
 - If you also have a fundraising goal, push out fundraising updates during the event. Make sure supporters have a way to donate!
 - Ask participants to wear their shirts and post photos/videos of themselves wearing the shirt and running the race. Ask them to tag your organization (and YWCA USA!) using #WWV21 in the photos.
 - Keep your shirts available for purchase throughout your event – just in case others want to commemorate the race with a shirt.

AFTER THE EVENT

- **Thank your participants:** Go live on Instagram or Facebook to thank

participants, announce the winners (if this was a race), and give a final fundraising update at the end of your event.

- **Gather photos and videos.** Ask participants to send you photos of them participating and/or wearing their commemorative gear. These can be compiled for your later use.
- **Send follow-up emails to thank:**
 - Your participants - send an email directing them to race results, where to find your next event, and when more info will be available.
 - Your sponsors – thank them for their sponsorship and let them know about any future events.
- **Post-race results and photos.** Participants want to see anything associated with the event so they can remember their experience and remember to sign up next year!
- **Send medals/awards to race winners.**

REPORT BACK

- Don't forget to let YWCA USA know how your race went by filling out the report back form about your event on your dashboard. Your feedback helps us highlight the amazing work YWCAs are doing across the country.

TIPS FOR GETTING TO KNOW YOUR POLICYMAKERS

Week Without Violence is a great time to ramp up your advocacy to elected officials.

WHO ARE YOUR ELECTED POLICYMAKERS?

- **Make a list of the local, state, and federal legislators you want to influence.** Make sure you cover the entire area that you serve and where your staff and volunteers live; don't just limit yourself to where your YWCA is physically located. Consider asking members of your board if they have any personal or professional relationships with lawmakers and can help connect you to

TIP: You can find your federal legislators [here](#). Through GovTrack, you can also see their bio, committee assignments, official website, donors, and scores from interest groups on their votes.

them.

- **What Do You Know About Them?** Learn the basics such as:
 - Which committees do they serve on? Prioritize building relationships with lawmakers who serve on key committees.

TIP: For example, Congress' Appropriation Committees are key to federal funding decisions. The federal Judiciary Committees are key on VAWA's reauthorization. The Senate Banking Committee determines housing policy.

- What is the e-mail and contact information for their staff? On a state and local level, prioritize Chiefs of Staff. On a federal level, include key Washington, D.C. staff aides who handle health and children's issues, local district directors, and schedulers (Note: D.C.-based legislative staff have a high turnover, so set a reminder to confirm the staff on a regular basis such as every six months).

TIP: YWCA USA can also provide much of this information about Members of Congress.

- What are their social media channels?
- What biographical information might be important for you to know about them?
- What are their voting records or sponsorships on legislation that is central to your work?

- **You also need to determine:**

- Are they known to your Board Members, other senior leadership, or volunteers? Do you have people in your network who personally know these legislators?
- What issues do they care most about? The answer to this question is essential to know before you meet.

STARTING AND KEEPING A RELATIONSHIP

- Make a point of introducing your YWCA to each newly elected or re-elected legislator by:
 - Sending a letter expressing interest in working together in the years ahead.
 - Providing brief background information, including, for example, your annual report or promotional brochure, along with a standing invitation to visit your local association to see your services.
 - Put the legislator on your outreach list as you would a potential big donor and join their e-newsletter/follow their social media channels.
 - When you are ready, request a meeting at the legislator's office to discuss your organization, its current situation, future plans, and issues of concern. Consider checking in with your state legislator once a quarter, and at minimum, a month or two before the legislative session begins and once during session. A member of Congress should meet with

representatives of your organization about once a year, and additionally, you should try to interact with their staff at least once a quarter. If you are hoping to meet with the Member of Congress, suggest dates that are during Congressional Recess. Periodic, regular interactions are critical to building relationships, so that Members of Congress take your call or respond to your email when there is a time-sensitive vote or policy ask. The regular check-in can be simply sharing a success story, inviting them to your big fundraising gala, or sharing a publication from YWCA or one of your other professional partners.

FACILITY TOUR

- What better way to cultivate a relationship with a policymaker than inviting them to see your organization in action while also keeping in mind safety requirements? Check out our [hosting a legislator](#) how-to guide!



CONTACTING YOUR POLICYMAKERS

While it's important to do whatever you can, given the time you have available, here is what Congressional staff rank as most effective to least effective in terms of making your voice heard:

HOW TO CONTACT YOUR POLICYMAKERS

- **Personal call or meeting.** If someone from your board/network knows the legislator, you can ask the scheduler to add this person to the legislator's list of supporters whose calls they will return during a set "call time" each day. A request for a call through a personal connection can be key if there is a time-sensitive issue/vote. Otherwise, a personal meeting or facility visit is the most

TIP: A personal meeting or facility tour in the district usually takes at least a month to schedule. If you can meet with your legislator in Washington, D.C., or the state capitol, you can usually get a meeting with the legislator or staff member within 1-2

effective way to have the legislator understand your issue. You don't need to know the legislator personally to request a meeting or site visit.

Your voice and your community deserve to be heard. Use these tips and tools to ensure that you are using the most effective way of advocating on the issues you care about!

- **Signed coalition letter.** Send a letter signed by a few prominent local organizations (associations, nonprofits, or for-profit companies) with your logos at the top and the signatures of key senior.

➤ executives. Once you've sent the letter by email to the office, be sure to send it directly to the staff contact responsible for the issue you are addressing and/or District Director. You can also link to the letter on your social media channel and send to the policymaker's account.

➤ **Social media messages.** A survey of Congressional staff found that as few as 30 social media comments were effective to get a lawmaker's attention on a given topic. Check out our [Social Media Tools](#) for tips and best practices.

➤ **Personal emails to staff with whom you have built relationships or met recently.** Use an eye-catching, or at least clear, subject line. Each day, Congressional staff receive hundreds of e-mails. If you have not yet met with a staff member and there is an urgent reason to get in touch, call the main line and ask for the name and email of the staffer who handles the issue of interest to you.

TIP: Sometimes you will only be given the name, but not the email address. If you are contacting a staffer for your House Member, the standard format is "Firstname.LastName@mail.house.gov" and if they work for your Senator, it is "Firstname_Lastname@Senator'sLastname.senate.gov".

➤ **Letters on letterhead.** Letters from local organizations e-mailed to the right staff

member also get noticed. If members of your board or coalition partners are also business owners, encourage them to speak up in that capacity. Personal stories are also very powerful.

➤ **General emails sent through the office's website account** are fine but may go to spam. Send directly to individuals as often as possible.

TIP: In addition to building a relationship with the elected official, also try to get to know their local key staff member. For a Member of Congress, that is usually the District Director.

➤ **Scripted calls to the main office line / postcards to offices** are among the least effective communications, unless they are received by the office at an extraordinarily high volume. Physical mail goes through security and is often delayed. Some offices just count the number of calls they receive but don't take your information.

➤ **Petitions. Please, please know the limits of petitions!** Elected officials dismiss messages that aren't confirmed to come from their own constituents. With rare exceptions, the primary purpose of petitions is for the organization to collect your contact information for future use. Sign them if you will but know that your job as an advocate is not done by doing so!

HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL LEGISLATOR SITE VISIT

What better way to cultivate a relationship with a policymaker than inviting him or her to see your organization in action?

*Please note YWCA USA can help you turn these visits into **virtual** meetings. We can help facilitate that meeting on a variety of platforms. YWCA USA is using Zoom, but Members of Congress may require another technology platform. If you do a virtual meeting with your Senators, this is a great opportunity to make this a joint opportunity with your sister associations in the state just as you did with Capitol Hill Day during the national conference. After each meeting, please remember to share your notes that list the Member of Congress, staffer, and any feedback with advocacy@ywca.org so we can track our progress and collective impact.*

PLANNING AND ASKING FOR THE SITE VISIT

- **Identify the correct legislators.** In Congress, each of your associations is represented by at least one Representative and two Senators. Even if you have employees or families that you serve from multiple Congressional districts, it is considered bad form for Members of Congress to host events outside of their district. So, if you have multiple service locations, make sure to provide the opportunity to visit a location in the area they represent.
- **Identify windows of opportunity.** Most groups will plan local events around federal recess periods, particularly around Easter, Memorial Day, July 4th, and the entire month of August. You can see the House schedule [here](#) or the Senate schedule [here](#).
- **Sending and confirming the invitation.** Their schedules fill up early, particularly

Inviting a legislator to tour your local YWCA of one of your offsite programs is one of the **best ways to show them the impact of our mission to your community.**

around long recess periods, so the invitation should be sent at least three weeks to a month in advance of your preferred date. It is helpful if you provide a few possible dates. For a Senator, they will plan a series of events in the same part of the state when home, so your willingness to be flexible will be helpful. After emailing the invitation letter on your official letterhead to the office's scheduler, wait a day or two and then follow up to confirm it was received.

- **Share a brochure and relevant materials.** Share with the legislator's office by email material about your

association, the programs you provide, and information about your impact (employment numbers, a few positive testimonials from women and families served) along with brief information on the policy issue you're interested in having addressed. You can send this in advance of the visit and then give to the legislator as "take away" material from the visit.

- **Confirm with scheduler.** About 1-2 weeks before the event, check in with the scheduler to confirm the visit and who will be attending with the member and your cell phone as a contact for that day. When confirming, you can provide map/directions for parking, check on whether the legislator wants it to be open to the media, and provide any bios of the key staff/board members that the legislator will be meeting.
- **Work with Communications staff.** If you and the legislator agree that at least part of the visit can be open to press, ask the scheduler to connect you with their press secretary. You'll want to do a media advisory, and for your press release, you can ask for a press quote from your legislator. Finally, the visit should be featured on your social media, tagged with the legislator, and included on your website. Consider sharing the opportunity with Board members or prominent supporters. Sometimes the legislator will prefer a behind-the-scenes tour, and then you can highlight the visit afterward on your social media channels, e-newsletters, blogs, and website.

TIP: Remember to have clients who may be in pictures sign waiver forms.

VISIT

- Legislators want to know **how your organization impacts the local community**. It always helps to have external stakeholders, such as parents, private funders, community or school

partners join the visit even for a few minutes to speak in support of your work. Provide a clear timeline of the event and everyone's role in advance.

- Highlight the **connection between public funding (VAWA/FVPSA/Child Care/Housing, etc.) and the impact** your organization has in the local community.

TIP: Be ready to be flexible if the legislator is running late.

- **Make the "ask."** At some point during the visit, someone (such as a Board member or executive) should ask the legislator about your policy issue. YWCA USA can help work with you to identify a timely and appropriate request. Many legislators will not be experts on your work. Use the time to educate them about the families you serve, the issues you need help addressing, and that you are part of a broader, national YWCA network.
- **Draft Timeline of Event (30-60 minutes)**
 - Greet the legislator and staff with brief introductions (2-3 minutes)
 - Tour of the facility should begin promptly, and you should be ready to have someone take photos as you show your work in action supporting families (20 minutes)
 - Meet with community partners and/or staff to allow the legislator to make remarks, answer questions, and have an open interaction with

- your stakeholders and their constituents (30 minutes).
- Closing remarks and thank you (2-3 minutes – if you want to present a small token of gratitude, it must be under \$50 for ethics rules.) Don't forget to provide take away materials with your card/contact information included.
- Issue press release or photos/social media

- **Take the legislator wherever they request** (sometimes they will stop to talk to employees in passing, etc.) so make sure everyone is aware that the legislator is visiting and is prepared to answer questions.
- **Don't be discouraged** if it takes more than one invitation to schedule the visit.
- **Don't assume** they know about your association or your policy issues.

POST-VISIT

- **Send a thank you letter** shortly after the visit to the scheduler and staffer who accompanied the legislator
- **Monitor for any press coverage** and share with the legislator's communications staff

GENERAL TIPS

- **Plan well in advance.**
- **Be flexible with dates/times.**
- **Invite the relevant policy staffer** or District Director to accompany the legislator
- **Share schedule/flow of event** with relevant employees, staff, board members, and the scheduler for the legislator in advance.
- **Involve your key cheerleaders in the community** whether it is someone who was helped by your association, a board member, or corporate sponsor so the legislator hears about your broader impact.

TIPS FOR MEANINGFUL COALITION & BASE BUILDING

REFLECTING ON YWCA’S PLACE AS A LEADER IN ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, RACIAL VIOLENCE, AND RACISM

As YWCA prepares for Week Without Violence, there is much we can learn from reflecting on our leadership on issues related to gender-based violence and racial justice and considering whether we are coming from a place of “impacted leadership” or “privileged leadership.”

Impacted leadership refers to leadership by those who are, or who have, experiencing the impacts of the issues we are advocating around. In this case, impacted leadership would be leadership by survivors of gender-based violence, racial violence, and racism.

Too often, the people most directly impacted by gender-based violence and racism have been pushed to the margins in the collective conversation around gender-based or racial violence. They are often excluded from conversations about survivors’ concerns, needs, and wants.

Privileged leadership comes from people not directly affected by the issues. If you are not a survivor and not directly affected by gender-based or racial violence, you can consider yourself privileged in the anti-violence space.

“Survivor leadership is crucial at this moment. Now is our time to work across the nation to advance survivor justice and shift the narrative around ...violence in America.”

–Survivors’ Agenda

As leaders, it is incumbent on all of us to consider how we are exercising our leadership. Are we leveraging any privileged leadership we may have to center and support the leadership of those most directly impacted by gender-based violence and racism? Are we intentionally creating space for impacted leadership in our YWCAs and communities?

Meet Your Network Where They Are

As you evaluate how best to engage your network in the 2021 Week Without Violence campaign, consider the preparedness of your existing grassroots network to engage on issues of gender-based violence. Is your network ready to:

- Respect and follow the impacted leadership of others?
- Work with GBV and anti-racism coalition partners?
- Respond to calls to action from gender-based violence and racial justice coalition partners?

The answer to these and other questions can help you “right-size” your Week Without Violence activities for your network and your community. Your network might benefit most from awareness raising about gender-based violence in general—or they may be ready to participate in hosting a virtual town hall about the impact of COVID-19 on survivors, or to help ensure that survivors are able to safely register and vote in your community.

Intentionally and realistically assessing your network’s readiness to engage around gender-based or racial violence issues at the outset of your planning can help you engage your network where they are and build your relationship for future efforts—inside and outside of YWCA’s national Week Without Violence campaign.

Building Relationships and Trust with Community Partners

Build trust with your allies by showing up for their work in solidarity. As you plan for your upcoming Week Without Violence events, take time to make authentic connections and listen to their experiences. Here are some things you can do to build strong relationships with your community partners:

- Attend a forum, webinar, call, or town hall held by one of your partners
- Participate in a social media “push” by one of your partners
- Read your partner’s materials about gender-based violence
- Read out to learn more about the issue and the advocacy your community is already engaged in
- Consider co-convening an event

Remember: showing up only gets you partway. To build meaningful relationships, particularly with individuals and organizations working at the frontlines of justice issues, we must continually center and amplify the experiences of those closest to the issues. Strategies for advocating around ending gender-based violence and supporting survivors are most authentic when they come from survivors themselves.

Consider recruiting community partner—like other service providers, organizations, institutions, or businesses—as potential advocacy allies to expand your YWCA’s grassroots network. Working in concert with local organizations and building lasting meaningful relationships with them can support your work for Week Without Violence as well as strengthen your long-term grassroots base-building efforts. Consider reaching out to:

Direct service providers: Look for other groups in your community who focus on providing services to survivors. Learning from these service providers and the people they serve can strengthen your YWCA's efforts.

Community Advocacy Partners: Reach out to groups and organization you have worked within the past for Week Without Violence, Stand Against Racism. Share resources, talk about strategy, and plan shared events.

State, local, and national advocacy organizations: These organizations can provide information and expertise on state and/or federal legislation that will impact survivors, insight into issues facing survivors from various communities, and experience navigating the issues of survivors in various communities in your community, as well as on a national level. Moreover, many of these advocacy organizations will have grassroots networks developed that you may be able to tap into. National organizations often provide general information on issues, analysis of federal legislation and, in some cases, state-level data.