



STOP HANDGUN VIOLENCE

ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

STOP HANDGUN VIOLENCE
12 Broadway
BEVERLY, MA 01915
StopHandgunViolence.org



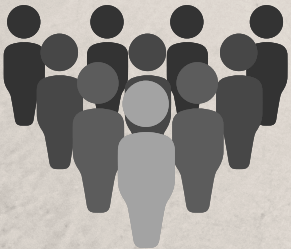
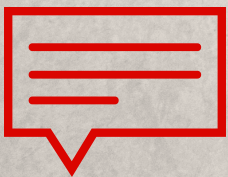
Table of Contents



Welcome and Purpose

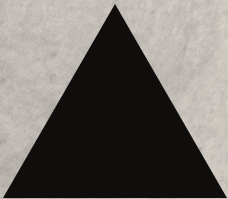
Step 1: Educate Yourself

- A. Facts about the Second Amendment
- B. Facts about gun violence
- C. Arguments the gun lobby makes, suggested talking points to counter them
- D. Common sense gun regulations save lives
- E. The difference between federal, state and local government
- F. How to identify your elected representatives (federal, state, and local) and whether they have taken money from the gun lobby
- G. How laws are made (federal/state) and where state law has been effective vs. federal law
- H. A sample state law agenda
- I. How to pass a state law ballot measure and where ballot measures have been effective
- J. How to pass a municipal ordinance or proclamation and where these instruments have been successful



Step 2: Educate Your Community

- A. Where to find like-minded people in your community
- B. Ideas for planning a school assembly or community event
- C. Messaging and drafting an Opinion Editorial or Letter to the Editor for local news outlets
- D. Communicating with your elected officials
- E. How digital platforms can be effective



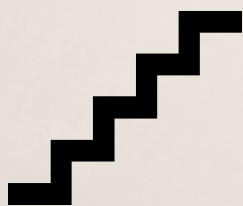
Step 3: Change Gun Laws

- A. Voting for candidates who support common sense gun safety regulations and initiatives and opposing ones who take money from the NRA
- B. Building coalitions

Library of Additional Resources



WELCOME & PURPOSE



This tool kit is intended to be a road map for students and anyone interested in getting actively involved in helping reduce firearm injuries and deaths in your home state.

We tried to keep this Tool Kit as straightforward and informative as possible. We hope that our step-by-step guide helps you educate yourself and others in order to save lives and make your community safer, just as we have successfully done in our home state of Massachusetts which has effective gun laws and the lowest rate of gun deaths in the Nation.

Changing the laws in your state will not be easy, but it is possible. We urge you to persevere.

About Us: Stop Handgun Violence is a Massachusetts-based non-profit organization that works to reduce firearm injuries and deaths through education, public awareness, common sense gun laws and strategic partnerships. In Massachusetts, Stop Handgun Violence has successfully changed the historically polarized debate between banning guns and unrestricted access to guns, to how can we effectively reduce gun access by dangerous individuals WITHOUT BANNING GUNS. Since 1994 Massachusetts has enacted effective gun violence prevention laws and regulations on a bi-partisan basis and has reduced the rate of gun deaths by 40%. Massachusetts simply treats guns like automobiles by requiring accountability and responsibility on the part of gun owners, dealers, manufacturers and law enforcement. The only guns that are banned in Massachusetts are assault weapons, large capacity ammunition magazines, bump stocks and cheap handguns known as Saturday Night Specials. We have done this by developing effective media and public education campaigns including one of the largest billboards in the nation, which has become a landmark in Boston. Other initiatives include distributing trigger locks, nationwide billboard campaigns, partnerships with educational institutions, local and national businesses, law enforcement and with the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Department of Justice. We have proven that gun laws save lives!

Special thanks to the UMass Emerging Leaders Program for their help in this Tool Kit effort.



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

In this section you will learn:

- A. Facts about the Second Amendment
- B. Facts about gun violence
- C. Arguments the gun lobby makes, suggested talking points to counter them
- D. Common sense gun regulations save lives
- E. The difference between federal, state and local government
- F. How to identify your elected representatives (federal, state, and local) and whether they have taken money from the gun lobby
- G. How laws are made (federal/state) and where state law has been effective vs. federal law
- H. A sample state law agenda
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STEP 1: Educate Yourself

A. Facts about the Second Amendment

"A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."



The Second Amendment does not protect:

- assault rifles
- large capacity ammunition magazines
- weapons not in the common use at the time of the founding of this country.

In the 2008 Supreme Court opinion *District of Columbia vs Heller*, Justice Antonin Scalia wrote for the narrow 5-4 majority that you cannot ban guns in the common use at the time of the country's founding, however "weapons not typically possessed by law-abiding citizens for lawful purposes, such as short-barreled shotguns" were not protected by the Second Amendment. Scalia further stated:

"Like most rights, the Second Amendment right is not unlimited, it is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.....nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on the longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms."

Second Amendment : Key Take Away

Do not be fooled by the NRA's lies and misinformation:



The Second Amendment does not prohibit banning assault weapons, large capacity ammunition magazines, background checks for all gun sales and other gun laws "imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms."



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

B. Facts about gun violence

- Over the past 40 years more than 1.5 million Americans have died from guns in the US, that is more Americans that have been killed by guns than all US service men and women killed in all foreign wars combined.
- Means Matter: 90% of people who survive a suicide attempt do not ultimately die by suicide. This is important because when a suicidal person has access to highly lethal means during an attempt, like a firearm, there is no second chance for them to get help.
- Women in the United States are 11 times more likely to be murdered with a gun than women in other high-income countries.
- Seven states have banned assault weapons.

60%

**of gun deaths
are suicides**

**A gun in the home
is more likely to
be used to kill
or injure an innocent
person in the home
than a threatening
intruder.**

**Over 35,000
Americans die each year
from gun violence**



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

There's a mass shooting of four or more people almost every day in the United States

There have been 1,607 mass shootings since the massacre at Sandy Hook.

B. Facts about gun violence

- Every 30 minutes a child is injured and every 3 hours a child dies from guns in the US
- There have been over 290 shootings at schools since Sandy Hook in 2012
- Federal law allows unrestricted access to military style assault weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines
- There is no background check requirement for private gun and ammunition sales in 30 states and at thousands of gun shows and flea markets each year

Additional Reading: "*11 Facts that tell the story of gun violence in 2017.*" by Daniel Nass of The Trace

Facts about gun violence: Key Take Away

Firearms are extremely lethal. Death is more likely the outcome for both homicide and suicide attempts when a firearm is used.

Of all suicide attempts, only 5.1% of cutting suicide attempts and 7.4% of poison suicide attempts are fatal, conversely 96.5% of firearm suicide attempts are fatal.





STEP 1: Educate Yourself

C. Arguments the gun lobby makes and talking points to effectively counter them



POINT: Guns protect women from assaults.



COUNTERPOINT: Women are five times more likely to be shot by an intimate partner than attacked by a stranger, and their likelihood of being killed by an abuser increases five times if their partner has access to a firearm.



POINT: Guns safety laws will not impact violence. It is more important to enforce existing laws.



COUNTERPOINT: More than 75% of guns used in American mass shootings have been purchased legally, mostly in states with weak gun laws. Stronger gun safety laws will tighten up the loopholes that allow violent criminals to access weapons. For example, urban Massachusetts has enacted some of the most effective gun laws, has reduced the rate of gun deaths by 40% since 1994 and has the lowest gun death rate in the Nation.

Americans support common sense gun laws

97% of Americans support universal background checks for all gun sales

83% support a mandatory waiting period for all gun purchases

75% of voters say Congress needs to do more to reduce gun violence

67% support a nationwide ban on the sale of assault weapons

SOURCE: Quinnipiac University Poll, February 20, 2018



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

C. Arguments the gun lobby makes and talking points to effectively counter them



POINT: The Second Amendment is an unlimited Constitutional right, it prohibits any regulations on guns and gun safety advocates want to ban all guns and infringe upon our Second Amendment rights.



COUNTERPOINT: The Second Amendment, like other Constitutional rights, is not unlimited and allows reasonable restrictions on gun sales and ownership.

In 2008, Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the majority of the Supreme Court in *District of Columbia v. Heller*, wrote:

"Like most rights, the Second Amendment right is not unlimited, it is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose.....nothing in our opinion should be taken to cast doubt on the longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms".

Stop Handgun Violence does NOT strive to restrict American's Constitutional rights. Stop Handgun Violence and peer groups DO believe in common-sense legislation that will help save lives without banning guns except assault weapons and cheap handguns without safety features.



POINT: Guns are not the problem, it's just mental illness.



COUNTERPOINT: Every country has people suffering from mental illness. The United States is the only country that arms them with military style weapons and easily concealed handguns without background checks and detection by law enforcement.



POINT: Guns don't kill people; people kill people.



COUNTERPOINT: People with access to guns kill more people, and do so with guns. States with high gun ownership rates have up to 114% higher gun homicide rates. Simply put, the more guns the more deaths by guns because guns are the most effective way to kill someone.



POINT: Keeping a gun at home keeps you safer.



COUNTERPOINT: A gun in the home actually makes household members more likely to be a victim of a homicide or suicide than in homes without guns.



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

D. Common sense gun regulations save lives

States with tougher gun laws have lower gun violence rates than states with lax gun laws.

Of the ten states with the strongest gun laws, as rated by Giffords Law Center, seven of them also have the lowest gun deaths rate (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island). The combined population of these states is nearly 30% of the total population of the country, yet their combined gun deaths only equal 15% of the gun deaths nationally.

What do we mean when we say strongest gun laws? Urban Massachusetts has enacted some of the most effective gun laws and regulations, including background checks for all gun sales and a permanent ban on assault weapons and ammunition magazines greater than 10 round. It has the lowest gun death rate in the nation. Similarly, California has enacted an extreme risk protective order, imposes a 10-day waiting period for gun purchases and allows law enforcement the power to deny applications for concealed carry licenses. California has the 7th fewest gun deaths per capita in the nation.

**To see how your state's gun laws stack up
against other states' gun laws,
check out the Giffords Law Center's
Annual Gun Law State Score Card:
<http://lawcenter.giffords.org/scorecard2017/>**



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

E. The difference between local, state and federal government

The United States is a democracy, which means it is governed by the people. In practice, that means that citizens express their wishes through voting and are governed by the will of the majority. It is also a Federal system, which means that both the national and state governments have power to enact and enforce gun safety legislation and rules.

Under the federal system, government exists at the local, the state and the federal level. While local and state governments do vary, most governments follow the same framework: for an idea to become law it must pass both the state or federal House and Senate and be signed by the Governor of the State or President. If a Governor or President vetoes a proposal passed by a state Legislature or Congress, a Legislature or Congress can vote again override the veto, usually with a two-thirds majority. Laws can also be contested in the courts, and upheld or struck down.

Federal Government

EXECUTIVE: President of the United States- Duties include power to veto, or sign legislation, command the armed forces, ask for the written opinion of their Cabinet, convene or adjourn Congress, grant reprieves and pardons, and receive ambassadors.

LEGISLATIVE: House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. Together they make up Congress. The House of Representatives includes 435 members which are distributed by population amongst the 50 states and elected for two-year terms. The U.S. Senate includes 100 members which are distributed evenly amongst the 50 states (2 per state) and elected for six-year terms. Together the House of Representatives and U.S. Senate write and pass the laws of the nation, which are then signed into law by the president.

JUDICIAL: The United State Supreme Court is the highest court in the U.S. however there are federal courts at the district (lowest) and appellate level (middle). The nine members of the Supreme Court are nominated by the president and serve lifelong terms. The Supreme Court's core purpose is to interpret whether a law or government action is constitutional.



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

E. The difference between local, state and federal government

State Government

EXECUTIVE: Each state has a Governor who acts as a state level executive. Governors are elected for two or four-year terms, based on which state they are serving.

LEGISLATIVE: All but one state also has a state level house of representatives and state senate, the exception being Nebraska which only has a state senate. Both branches are frequently referred to as the state legislature.

JUDICIAL: Similar to the federal judicial branch, states have a high court (usually called a state supreme court), appellate courts, and district courts.

Local Government

EXECUTIVE: Can include city mayors and parish presidents.

LEGISLATIVE: Can include any of the following: City council, town board, town council, board of aldermen. These groups of people pass ordinances that govern the local population, just like laws do at the state and national level. School boards also operate as a legislative body since they frequently make rules that govern the school district.

JUDICIAL: City courts usually have limited jurisdiction and process lower level offenses such as traffic tickets.



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

F. How to find your elected representatives and whether they have taken money from the gun lobby

Every American living in one of the fifty United States has the following:

- 1) A President
- 2) 2 U.S. Senators
- 3) A U.S. Representative
- 4) A Governor
- 5) A state senator
- 6) At least one state representative (except Nebraska)

PRO TIP:
Each elected
official is an opportunity
to lower gun deaths.



In addition, most Americans have additional locally elected officials including: judges, mayors, city councilpersons, school board, town meeting members, water board, parish president, attorney general, district attorneys, lieutenant governor, and others.

You can find every elected official who represents you on Ballotpedia here: <http://bit.ly/WhoRepsToolKit>. You can find out which gun rights organizations have contributed to your federal elected officials' campaigns on Opensecrets.org: <http://bit.ly/NRADonations>

Top 10 recipients of funds from gun lobby interests among members of Congress, 1989-2018

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Rep. Paul Ryan (WI01) - \$352,464 | 6. Sen. Pat Toomey (PA) - \$168,260 |
| 2. Rep. Don Young (AK01) - \$219,976 | 7. Rep. Pete Sessions (TX32) - \$160,476 |
| 3. Sen. John Cornyn (TX) - \$191,825 | 8. Sen. Marco Rubio (FL) - \$158,194 |
| 4. Sen. Ron Johnson (WI) - \$189,498 | 9. Sen. Rand Paul (KY) - \$154,290 |
| 5. Sen. John Thune (SD) - \$183,215 | 10. Sen. Roy Blunt (MO) - \$153,543 |

This information is available for local elected officials on State Election Commission and Secretary of State websites



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

G. How a bill becomes a law and where state law has been effective

To change the law for all fifty states, you have to change federal law and work with the President, U.S. Senators and U.S. House of Representatives.

To change your state's laws you need to work with your Governor and your state senators and state representatives (just state senators in Nebraska).

To change the law in your city, you need to work with your mayor and your city council, town board, town council or town meeting, board of selectmen or alderman.

To change the law via state legislature:

STEP 1: The Creation of a Bill

A bill can start in either the House or Senate chamber of the state legislature when it's introduced. Members of the State House or State Senate draft, sponsor and introduce bills for consideration. State legislators frequently introduce bills written or proposed by advocates and constituents. For sample legislation including key elements of strong gun bills check out [Giffords Law Center](#).

STEP 2: Committee Action

Usually, a committee or a small group of elected officials is assigned to study the bill. The Committee votes to accept or reject the bill and holds public hearings to gather the public's support or opposition for a bill. Individuals can attend a public hearing and provide testimony in support or opposition of bills. Check your state legislature's home page for upcoming hearings that you may be interested in providing testimony for.

Changing the law is not quick or easy to do, but it is possible. For purposes of this guide we will describe how to change the law three ways:

- 1) Changing the law via the state legislature
- 2) Changing the law via a state ballot initiative
- 3) Changing the law via a municipal (local) proclamation



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

G. How a bill becomes a law and where state law has been effective

STEP 3: Floor Action

The bill is returned to the full House or Senate floor for further debate and approval. At this point members may propose amendments to the bill, add additional text, or otherwise alter the bill.

STEP 4: Vote

House and Senate members vote on their respective versions of the proposed bill.

STEP 5: Conference Committees

A bill must be approved by both chambers of the legislature. If the bill has differences between the two chambers, the bill is sent to a Conference Committee comprised of House and Senate members to resolve any legislative differences with the goal of creating a common version.

STEP 6: Executive Action

After the bill is passed by both chambers it is sent to the Governor for approval or signature, which if granted creates a state law. When a Governor refuses to sign a bill it is known as a veto. A vetoed bill can be overturned by a majority in the House and Senate or returned to the Legislature for reconsideration.

STEP 7: The Creation of a Law

The new law is now codified into the state general laws and requires a legislative action to change it.

Many states have passed stronger gun laws than the existing federal laws. Some state law examples include:

- Licensing required for all gun owners
- Assault weapons and high capacity magazines banned
- Universal background checks, including at gun shows, online and private sales
- Prohibiting domestic abusers from purchasing firearms
- Consumer protection standards
- Safe storage requirements to prevent suicides, theft and accidental shootings
- Minimum age for carrying a firearm



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

H. A sample state law agenda

To work on changing your state law, start with learning what your state's laws are. The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence has comprehensive material on each state's gun laws. You can find out what your state laws are and what your state is lacking at:

<http://lawcenter.giffords.org>

Are you interested in passing universal background checks for all gun sales including at gun shows, online and private sales?

97% of Americans want a background check for all gun sales, but less than half of states require it:

California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
District of Columbia
Hawaii (permit/license required for purchase)
Illinois (permit/license required for purchase)
Iowa (permit/license required for purchase of handguns)
Maryland (handguns and assault weapons only)
Massachusetts (permit/license required for purchase)
Michigan (permit/license required for purchase of handguns)
Nebraska (permit/license required for purchase of handguns)
Nevada (law not currently enforced)
New Jersey (permit/license required for purchase)
New York
North Carolina (permit/license required for purchase of handguns)
Oregon
Pennsylvania (handguns only)
Rhode Island
Washington



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

H. A sample state law agenda

Are you interested in banning large ammunition magazine capacities?

States that have limits on magazine capacities:

California (10 rounds)
Colorado (15 rounds)
Connecticut (10 rounds)
District of Columbia (10 rounds)
Hawaii (Handguns only, 10 rounds)
Maryland (10 rounds)
Massachusetts (10 rounds)
New Jersey (10 rounds)
New York (10 rounds)

Are you interested in passing an assault weapons ban?

States that have an assault weapons ban:

California
Connecticut
District of Columbia
Hawaii
Maryland
Massachusetts
New Jersey
New York

While most gun deaths in the United States are not due to mass shootings, the media attention surrounding mass shootings often exposes loopholes in our national gun laws.

For example, police were called to the homes of the shooters in the Parkland and Isla Vista shootings multiple times because the shooters were suspected of plotting violent crimes. However, in both cases, police were unable to legally separate firearms from the shooter.

Some states have closed this loophole by passing extreme risk protective order/gun violence restraining order, including:

California
Connecticut
Indiana
Oregon
Washington



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

I. How to pass a ballot measure and where ballot measures have been effective

A ballot initiative allows citizens to put new legislation on the voting ballot through a petition.

Very generally the steps to passing a ballot initiative are:

- 1) Write the Ballot Initiative/proposed legislation
- 2) File and approve it with the Secretary of State's Office
- 3) Collect signatures of citizens (each state has a required number)
- 4) Certify signatures with Secretary of State's Office, if required number of signatures received it is put on the popular ballot
- 5) Campaign in favor of Ballot Initiative
- 6) Vote on Ballot Initiative
- 7) If it passes the Initiative becomes law and must be enforced by the state Legislature and Governor

Five states have passed stronger gun laws by ballot initiative:

- Nevada (universal background checks)
- California (required background check for ammunition sales and prohibits high capacity magazine)
- Oregon (background check requirement at gun shows)
- Colorado (background check requirement at gun shows)
- Washington (background checks and extreme risk protection orders)



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

I. How to pass a ballot measure and where ballot measures have been effective

Twenty-one states allow citizens to collect petitions and put proposed legislation on the ballot. Those states are:

Alaska	Nebraska
Arizona	Nevada
Arkansas	North Dakota
California	Ohio
Colorado	Oklahoma
Idaho	Oregon
Maine	South Dakota
Massachusetts	Utah
Michigan	Washington
Missouri	Wyoming
Montana	

For resources on how to
initiate your own state
ballot measure, visit
Ballotpedia.org





STEP 1: Educate Yourself

J. How to pass a municipal ordinance, resolution or proclamation, what the differences are and where these instruments have been successful

Ordinances:

At the city and local level, there are ordinances, resolutions and proclamations. Ordinances carry the weight of law locally and are usually passed by the City Council, Board of Selectmen or Town Meeting. Violating a city ordinance can lead to penalties, such as fines and even jail time.

Cities, like Richmond, VA have successfully used ordinances to prevent gun owners from transporting loaded firearms on public streets. There are however some limits that states have imposed to prevent local governments from regulating firearms. For a list of over 80 local ordinances passed in Virginia counties and cities, see the online Library of Resources.

Another city ordinance that we suggest: **Lower the voting age in your hometown**

Teens successfully advocated to lower the local voting age in both Takoma Park and Hyattsville, Maryland. As FairVote reports "Empirical evidence suggests that the earlier in life a voter casts their first ballot, the more likely they are to develop voting as a habit. By lowering the voting age to 16, young people will be engaged meaningfully in the democratic process while they are taking civics courses, and before they leave their home communities for college."

For more on this topic, check out "Lowering the Voting Age: A Legal Feasibility Study" a report by Generation Citizen linked to in the Library of Resources

The following states allow local governments to permit 16 & 17-year-olds to vote in local elections:

California
Colorado
Illinois
Maryland
Massachusetts*
New Mexico
Ohio
Oklahoma
Rhode Island
South Dakota
Vermont*

*after state legislature approval



STEP 1: Educate Yourself

J. How to pass a municipal ordinance, resolution or proclamation, what the differences are and where these instruments have been successful

Resolutions:

Resolutions do not carry the weight of law to the general public. However they frequently direct administrative or legal action by a local government. For example, cities use resolutions to tell a local administrative agency to increase/decrease local taxes and speed limits.

Proclamations:

Proclamations are generally more ceremonial and carry less legal weight than either an ordinance or resolution. However, they can still be a powerful signal to legislators and the gun lobby that the community favors common sense gun laws. School boards/committees, town councils and other local governing bodies use proclamations to signal dissatisfaction with legislators or to urge legislators to support/oppose legislation. Most larger city councils have an online application for individuals to ask for a city level proclamation. For example, see the City of Dallas, TX proclamation page linked to in the online Library of Resources.

Spotlight on Rhode Island

The Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence worked with volunteers across the state to get a resolution from every school committee in the state to keep guns off school campuses. You can read the Barrington, RI School Committee Resolution and find an editable version for your school in our online Library of Resources.



STEP 2: Educate Your Community

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

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

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

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

Once you have identified which of your networks you will be working with, try to recruit friends, fellow students, parents or coworkers to help.





STEP 2: Educate Your Community

B. Ideas for planning a school assembly or community event

How to plan a community event:

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

Sample 30-minute format:

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

Check out the online Library of Resources for sample 45-minute, 60-minute, 90-minute and 2-hour formats for events



STEP 2: Educate Your Community

C. Messaging and drafting Opinion Editorial or Letter to the Editor for local news outlets

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

Drafting your own Op-Ed or LTE, is simple if you stay focused on a core main idea. The Community Tool Box, created by the University of Kansas, suggests the following steps:

- 1) Open with a simple salutation (greeting), like "To the Editor"
- 2) Grab the readers' attention
- 3) Explain what the letter is about
- 4) Explain why the issue is important
- 5) Give evidence for any praise or criticism
- 6) State your opinion about what should be done
- 7) Keep it brief
- 8) Sign the letter
- 9) Check your letter to make sure it's clear and to the point

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

**Write your own Op-ed or LTE using
our template online at:
<http://bit.ly/ToolkitOpEd>**



STEP 2: Educate Your Community

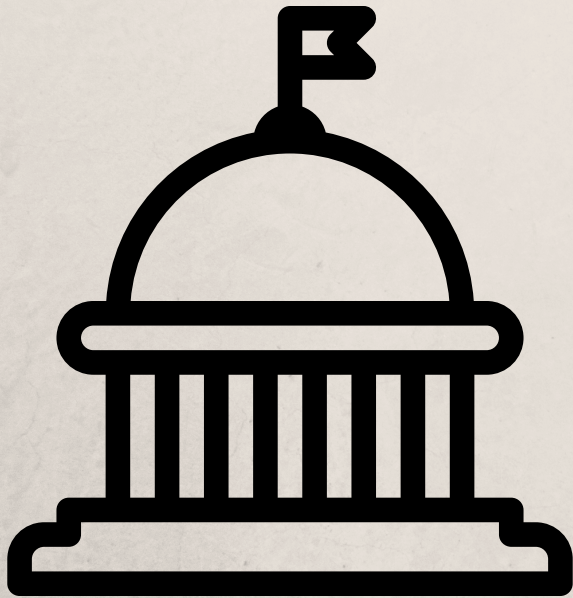
D. Communicating with your elected officials

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

1) Town Hall style meeting: These meetings are open to the public, although some elected officials require you to RSVP.

Pro: Constituents are able to ask questions to the elected officials.

Con: A large audience may prevent all attendees to ask a question.



2) Planned private meetings with elected officials or staff: You can call any elected officials and ask for a private meeting with them in their office.

Pro: You'll be able to speak directly with elected officials or their staff.

Con: Getting on an elected official's calendar can take weeks of advance notice and can be cancelled on short notice

3) Emails/written correspondence: In addition to a physical mailing address, most elected officials have an email address or online form to submit a comment.

Pro: You can write out a clear statement of support from your home; it is easy to convince friends and family to join you in this effort. Con: Most of the time you will receive no response from your elected official; this correspondence works best in bulk (when many people write about the same issue to the same elected official).





STEP 2: Educate Your Community

D. Communicating with your elected officials



4) Phone calls: Most elected officials have a main phone number for constituents to call for any reason at all.

Pro: You usually get to speak to a real human or at the very least leave a message that a real human conveys to the elected official.

Con: Calls in support of a policy are most effective when they are cumulative (multiple people call).

5) Office drop-ins: Most elected officials have offices open to the public during normal business hours. As a constituent you may stop by to state your opinion on any matter.

Pro: You are able to state your case in person

Con: You are usually talking to a lower level staff, you very rarely get to speak to the elected official.

"When I receive five calls on any one issue in any one day, I consider that my phone ringing off the hook and that we need to take action." - Massachusetts State Representative



STEP 2: Educate Your Community

D. Communicating with your elected officials

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

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

Sample call in support of specific bill:

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



STEP 2: Educate Your Community

D. Communicating with your elected officials

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

Pro Tip:

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



STEP 3: **Change Gun Laws**

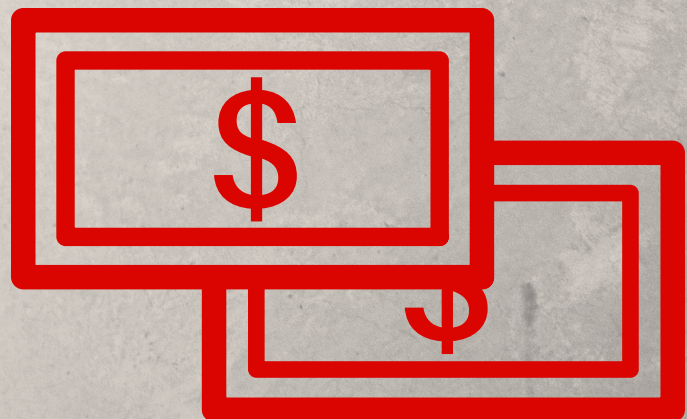
A. Voting for candidates who support common sense gun safety regulations and initiatives and opposing ones who take money from the NRA

Ultimately, some elected officials will never change their position on guns, and the only way to move policy in your state will be to vote those people out of office.

In any vote you make, take care to vote for candidates who support gun safety laws and initiatives and opposing ones who take money from the NRA.

Identifying which politicians fall into that category may be tricky, but here are some tips for identifying them:

- 1) Has the elected official taken money from the NRA or a local affiliate? You can find this information on the Federal Election Commission website or state level election commission websites. Links to the FEC are in the online Library of Resources.
- 2) Has the elected official sponsored/cosponsored or voted for any legislation that makes it easier to get guns or allows more people to carry loaded hidden firearms in public places? Some examples: Permit-less concealed carry laws, strict scrutiny laws, extending licensing laws to younger populations, allowing guns on school campus, removing disqualifying convictions for the list of prohibited people, creating exceptions to gun laws for classes of people (veterans, law enforcement, concealed carry permit holders), stand your ground laws, and efforts to repeal permit-to-purchase legislation
- 3) Has the elected official used tired gun lobby arguments as to why gun laws will not work in your state?
See pages 6-7 for arguments.





STEP 3: Change Gun Laws

B. Building coalitions

Building coalitions of interested individuals and groups can be hard work as each person coming to the issue may be coming with a different set of interests or concerns. However, in the end the hard work usually pays off. The important thing to remember is that everyone working on gun violence prevention is there to keep the community safe. Whether or not you agree on each other's tactics, you should be respectful of each other and never work to counter what your allies are doing. Coming at an issue from two different angles can also be helpful because legislators are also diverse and where a partner fails to move a legislator you might be successful, and vice versa.

We encourage engaging the following constituencies when building your coalition:

SubGroup	Professions	Why This Group Matters
Public Service Workers	Law enforcement, legislators, district attorneys, community activists, spiritual leaders	Members of this subgroup understand policy. They see it in action and what makes good and bad policy. They can take the lead on helping craft language, provide procedural insight and structure arguments effectively
Firearm Specialists	Firearm owners, hunters, dealers, licensing authorities, and trainers	This subgroup can be a valuable addition to any advocacy effort as they can help you craft messages that are amenable to wider audiences
Subject Matter Experts	Criminologists, public health advocates, educators, mental health professionals	Each of these individuals brings data and experience to every component of gun legislation. Their help is critical to crafting policy that creates the most positive effects while weighing potential unintended consequences.
Lived Experience	Survivors, victims, physicians, rehabilitated criminals, business owners	This group's life experience will help contribute unique perspectives and appeal to the emotions of your target audience.