



## **POWER CIVICS COMMUNITY FORUM GOALS & ORGANIZING GUIDE**

### **GOALS**

There are three primary goals of a Power Civics Community Forum: 1) to identify those community stakeholders who care about the community but lack the know-how needed to get results; 2) to connect with the community's people and its problems; and 3) to better learn the 10-Step, No-Blame Problem Solving method by teaching it to others.

The first goal helps students learn that potential citizen leaders who could positively improve their community are shackled by ignorance of their city's decision making centers, the legal and political levers by which they can affect decision making, and the basic tenets of practical problem solving of public issues. Students who care about social justice will also learn that there can be no racial or gender equality until there is equal access to the knowledge of how regular citizens can exercise the fullness of their political power.

The second goal - to connect with the community and its problems - helps students broaden and expand their understanding of the issues that affect their fellow citizens' daily lives. This understanding will drive student engagement, and the connection to community members who care about their city, will help to sustain it. The program for the Forum (as outlined in the Organizing Guide) reinforces this goal and is also designed to maximize the students' connection to present and potential local leaders and to local issues.

The third goal - to better learn the practice of practical No-Blame Problem Solving - is based upon the principle expressed by the first professor to host a Power Civics Community Forum: "To teach what you've learned is to truly learn." During the Forum, students teach and help community members learn how to apply this proven problem solving method to their own community-based issues. In doing so, students gain confidence in their newly learned problem solving skills and at the same time, teach their fellow citizens that they have more power than they think they have.

## **ORGANIZING GUIDE**

### 1) Length of Forum:

Minimum 1 ½ hours; 2 hours is preferable, as it permits a delayed start so that latecomers do not disrupt the Forum.

### 2) Program:

Essential Elements - i) Selected students review the subjects of 10-online Power Civics video classes highlighting the theme “You have more power than you think you have” (20 minutes); ii) Students provide an overview of the 10-Step No-Blame Problem Solving method they learned in their own classes and use their own project(s) as an issue example(s); iii) Students ask the audience to choose one or more local problems which they would like to address. This can be done with the audience as a whole choosing one single issue, or by breaking the audience into groups of 6 or more interested in a particular issue.

### Optional Elements:

- i. If the city has a Civic Trust, Civic Trustees make excellent guest speakers. Approximately 5 minutes of remarks by a Civic Trustee talking about their experiencing local and political power that they were unaware they had, conveys a powerful and inspirational message.
- ii. Students can also offer a brief review of the process for applying to serve as an appointee of a city board or as a Civic Trustee. This too is often of interest to Forum audiences.

### Handouts:

The above Optional Elements can be supplemented with the following:

- i. An application form for positions on city boards and commissions
- ii. An application form for Civic Trusteeship in their city, if the city hosts a Civic Trust, or an online application, if not

### 3) Target Audience:

- i. **Quality:** The size of the Forum audience is not as important as its quality or nature. A quality audience is composed of attendees who have an interest in empowering their city, but who lack knowledge of

their power to get results without waiting for the political establishment to act.

- ii. Size: The size of the audience may range from 30 to 150. Each student bringing one or two guests whom they know and who fit the “quality” criteria above, can result in more continuity of civic engagement for both students and their guests, and personal relationships often provide the glue for civic relationships. In some circumstances, where city nonprofits, civic and religious organizations are truly supportive, a larger audience size may be more desirable.

4) Location:

The best location for a Power Civics Community Forum is one: a) that fits the projected audience size; a small audience in a cavernous space is not conducive to a good forum; b) that has a central/accessible location (an obvious benefit) and if possible, has mass transit accessibility (also considered a plus); c) that has available and proximate parking (always considered helpful); and finally, (d) that has audio/visual equipment available onsite, which is very helpful for use in showing the audience sample classes from the online Power Civics curriculum.

5) Convenient Forum Times:

City residents may have difficulty attending during usual work day hours, therefore, the best times are weekday evenings with a start time of between 6 or 7pm and/or Saturdays from 10:00 am to noon.

6) Refreshments:

Offering a light meal is helpful, especially if students are planning an evening forum for a smaller audience. This allows audience members to come directly from work and reduces the time demand on their busy lives. For Saturday morning forums, coffee and water, and perhaps some bagels or pastries can be provided.

Refreshments are not an essential element of the forum, but one cannot ignore the maxim that: “If you feed them, they will come.”

7) Posters, invitations, notices

See the attached Power Civics Forum announcement, program and participant survey. These were used in a successful Power Civics Community Forum held at Rutgers-Newark.