

OVEC House Party Guide

INTRODUCTION

One of the easiest special events, and sometimes one of the most lucrative, is a house party for OVEC. This is an incredible way to support a great organization while introducing new people to our issues and encouraging them to become members.

In some ways, it seems funny to describe how to do a house party. Anyone who has ever had a birthday party, school picnic, anniversary celebration, or a small commitment ceremony already possesses the knowledge and experience necessary to organize and host a house party. However, because sometimes the seemingly easy events are fraught with pitfalls, some obvious and not-so obvious tips on hosting a house party are described below.

WHAT IS AN OVEC HOUSE PARTY?

A house party is a social event organized by you to invite your friends to a party at your house, in your backyard, at a church or anywhere people can gather as a means of educating guests about OVEC and to increase our membership base and generate more financial support for OVEC's programs.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

A house party provides a social setting to meet people, see old friends and have good food and drink. When organized correctly, it sets up a cordial atmosphere for someone not familiar with OVEC to hear about our work and ask questions. No matter what else you ask people to do, ask them to join OVEC as a paying member, or, if they don't want to become a member, donate to OVEC's work. It is the only thing they can do right on the spot and, because it is usually the most passive action, it requires the least amount of work.

EXPAND DONOR BASE

The final use of a house party, which underlies all the other uses, is to expand the organization's donor base and active membership. The more OVEC can build its base, the more we can increase our power as an organization. At the end of the house party, the organization has a fresh list of people it can add to its donor base to target for future financial solicitations.

ORGANIZING A HOUSE PARTY

There are five easy steps to organizing and hosting a house party:

1. Find someone who is willing to host and organize the event – preferably you.
2. Prepare a list of the people to be invited.
3. Design the invitation.
4. Choreograph the event including what to serve and “the pitch.”
5. Follow up and evaluate.

THE HOSTS

The host of a house party has several responsibilities, the least of which is providing the house and refreshments:

- Devises an invitation list of anyone he or she thinks might be interested in the organization or the topic being discussed;
- Gives an appropriate description of the organization and the issues;
- Introduces the guest speaker, one most familiar with the issue to be discussed. This can usually be an OVEC volunteer, board member or staff person; and
- Makes a pitch for money.

The host must be someone who has contributed a gift, regardless of size, that was significant to her or him. The donor asks the guests to join him or her in making a significant gift of their own.

The ideal host is already an OVEC supporter or someone who wants to get more involved.

THE INVITATION LIST

Once someone has volunteered to host the event, an OVEC volunteer or staff person can assist. A house party can have any number of people, but it generally works best when there are at least 12 guests and not more than 40. Determining the size of the invitation list should be driven by how many people the location can comfortably accommodate. If a presentation is planned, it's important to make sure most of the people can sit down at that time. If there is not a presentation planned and the pitch is to be short having appropriate seating will not be as important.

The rule of thumb is three times as many people as you want to attend should be invited to the party. Start with your friends, family and neighbors. Sometimes, a house party is also a way to meet your neighbors. Consider people from church, synagogue, mosque, social clubs, work, relatives, etc. Except for those people specifically invited to mingle and represent the organization, don't invite very many people who are already members or donors.

THE INVITATION

It is important to design the invitation specifically for the people being invited and should be mailed or sent out (electronically) at least 3 weeks in advance. The invitation does not have to be fancy, and it can be printed at an instant-print copy shop, so expense shouldn't be an issue. An OVEC staff person can assist you in designing and printing invitations for your party. For groups with access to desktop published programs, good-looking invitations can be turned out very inexpensively. The invitation should reflect something about the host as well as the people being invited. This will make people want to attend. Whether your invitation is to be serious or light, educational or assuming knowledge on the part of the invitee, always include the following:

- An indication that people will be asked for money. "Bring your checkbook" is the most direct way to make this known. You might also say, "A chance to learn about, and contribute to OVEC's important work." Or, "As we enter our 24th year, your financial support is more important than ever."
- A way for people to give without coming to the party. On the invitation's return card include the option, "I can't come, but want to help. Enclosed is my donation." You can even encourage them to go directly to our website at www.ohvec.org to become a member and donate.
- Encourage people to bring friends. Require an RSVP so you will know how many people are coming.
- Give people clear directions to the house. If finding the address is at all confusing, draw a map or print it out from www.mapquest.com. Include the phone number of the host under the directions.
- For a more-connected social networking crowd, a Facebook or Tweet invitation may be an easy way to send out an initial invitation.

THE EVENT

Think ahead and avoid party planning problems. Choreograph the event by imagining yourself as a guest at the house party and play over in your mind what will happen.

You walk or drive up to the house...

...Is it obvious where to park? (This can be important if you share a driveway with people not attending the party, if there is a hidden ditch near your house, or if your neighbors are the kind that are likely to call the police about a guest parked too near the crosswalk.) ... Is the house obvious? Is there a porch light? Is the house number lighted? Is there a sign saying "The OVEC House Party here"? This is especially important in rural communities where homes can be hard to see and in big apartment complexes where it may be confusing to find the right number.

You come in to the house or apartment...

... Is it obvious where to put your coat? If not, someone needs to be stationed at the door to provide that information. Ditto for the bathroom.

You look around for people you know and make your way to the food...

... Is there a traffic jam at the food table? Pull the table out from the wall so people can serve themselves from all sides of it. Put the drinks on a separate table removed from the food table to force people to move on from the food or from the drinks.

... People returning to the food table create a traffic jam, and people feeling hungry create a non-money-giving atmosphere. If the house allows it, there can be several, food tables in different rooms serving different kinds of food.

... Serve things that are easy to eat standing up – finger food rather than things that need a fork and knife. Don't serve anything that would be a disaster if spilled (such as red wine on light-colored carpeting, chili on your couch).

Once you get your food, you look for a place to sit...

... Are there enough chairs? Make sure no chair is sitting alone or obstructing people coming in and out of the entrance.

... When you're done with your food, where will you put your empty dish?

... Make sure there are several trash cans around for disposable dishes and utensils and a table for things to be washed.

THE SPECIAL MOMENT: THE PITCH

Everything at the house party should be built around the pitch to become a member or to donate. Make arrangements ahead of time with a couple of people who will pull out their checkbook, or hand over checks so that when the host says, "I hope you will make a donation." They don't have to be showy about it, but a few people have to set the tone that this is the time to join, give money or both.

Some people object to this practice, claiming that it imposes too much pressure. However, a little more thought will show that it is the considerate thing to do. Few people have the self-confidence to be the first to do anything. When the host asks for money, many people are prepared to give, but everyone has a brief attack of anxiety, "Perhaps this isn't when you give the money," or "Perhaps I am the only person in the room who believes in this cause," or "Perhaps everyone else already turned in their money and I will look odd if I give my money now."

- Time the pitch so that the most people will be there when it is made. This is usually an hour into the party. The host calls for people's attention. The OVEC representative(s) discreetly get membership materials and envelopes ready and the two to four "plants" space themselves around the room.
- The host introduces himself or herself and welcomes everyone. If there is a presentation, the host introduces the presenter. (If there is more than one host, such as a couple, or a group, they should take turns talking so it is clear that both or all are involved.)
- After the presentation, the host must be the one who gives the pitch. If the presenter is an OVEC representative, that person can sometimes make a formal request for money, followed by the host saying, "I hope you will join me in supporting or joining OVEC."
- It doesn't matter if the host is nervous or doesn't like asking for money. Your proceeds will be cut by at least half without a pitch from the party sponsor.
- Sometimes people argue that hosting the party – lending the house, fixing the food, giving the time – should indicate the hosts' interest. Indeed it does. It shows that the host helped save the group the cost of renting a conference room at a hotel. But, in order for the guests to give money, the host must also say that he or she gives money and wants anyone who agrees with him or her to do the same.
- How the pitch is made determines how the money will be collected. This is also decided ahead of time. The best way to get the most money at the party is to pass around envelopes immediately after the host speaks. If you would prefer, the host can say, "Please put your donation in the basket over there," and point to a place. Or the host can say, "You can hand me your check, or give it to any of the people wearing a carnation." In any case, tell people how and when to give the money.
- House parties often fail when the money is not collected right after the pitch (which directly follows a presentation, short documentary, etc.). Following the pitch and a short period for people to write checks, the hosts should thank everyone for coming and encourage them to stay, have more to eat and drink, and enjoy themselves.

EVALUATE AND FOLLOW UP

After each party, take some time to evaluate what went well and what could have been done better. Particularly if you have a regular presentation, think about the length, the relevance, how to get a discussion going, and so on.

- Be sure to follow up with the guests immediately.
- Write *thank you's* to everyone who gave money (within 72 hours of the event), and send their names immediately to OVEC so they can be added to the mailing list.
- If the host failed to make a pitch, send the people on the guest list an appeal letter within 48 hours.
- If people gave, go over the list of donors with the host. If people are missing from the list who the hosts thinks would have given but didn't take the opportunity to or forgot the host should call them. If the host does not want to call, perhaps he or she would send them a note; as a last resort, the OVEC can send them an appeal letter as soon as possible. Like all fundraising strategies and membership drives, house parties only work if someone actually asks. Otherwise a house party is just a party – fun but no new members or funds.

NOW LET'S PICK A DATE FOR A PARTY!

GET REGISTERED, GET HELP! Call OVEC 304-522-0246 if you have any questions. We can even put you in touch with an experienced house party host and OVEC staffer who will help you with all the details of house party planning.

SET A HIGH, REASONABLE GOAL

You are the best judge of how to set the suggested membership or contribution goals. The average party should raise \$500 to \$1000. Let your guests know your goal and encourage them to help you reach it. You can also have a goal of signing up people to donate monthly on OVEC's website via Paypal or Groundspring.org. This is a great way to upgrade if most attendees are current donors and members.

TIP

- Cleverness and originality always pays off on invitations. Consider something like this: "Skip dinner and let me cook for you. Donate what you would have spent on dinner."
- Name tags and a sign-in sheet are a great idea!
- Track donor progress – make a big sheet that you constantly update during the party, showing the progress toward the goal.

SAMPLE INVITATION

Dear Mary,

Come to a party to support the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition! I am raising money and recruiting new members to support OVEC's work to preserve and protect our state and region's environment, especially in coal mining communities. This is an important organization to me and our community. Come and talk with other fair-minded people like yourself, learn more about what OVEC is working on, and find out how you can join and help.

What? House Party for the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Coffee and dessert reception

Where? Our house, 123 Sunnyside Street

When? 7:00 – 9:00 PM on September 29, 2010

Who? Friends

How? See the attached map

Why? To keep building a powerful statewide environmental organization!

Please bring your checkbook and be prepared to make a donation to this great environmental organization. These funds go directly to help the programs of OVEC. Please RSVP at 000-000-0000 at your convenience, no later than (fill in the date).

If you cannot come to our party, consider sending us a donation that we can include with the rest of the contributions! Make checks payable to "OVEC" You can also donate online at www.ohvec.org



Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
P.O. Box 6753
Huntington, WV 25773-6753

304-522-0246
www.ohvec.org

www.ohvec.org