How to Create an Advocacy Workshop

[00:00:01] Welcome to All In Together's webinar on how you can plan an advocacy workshop in your community.

[00:00:07] My name is Claire Platt and I am the Community Engagement Manager for All In Together, and today I'm going to be taking you through a step by step guide on how you can plan your own advocacy workshop in your community. So first and foremost, what is an advocacy workshop? An advocacy workshop can really come in any shape or size and it can focus on any topic that is related to civic engagement, a particular issue area, or a community initiative that you really want to focus in on and get people involved in. And so, when you're planning your advocacy workshop it's really important that you think about what shape and size you want your particular workshop to take, whether it's a handful of your friends gathering in your living room to talk about civic engagement or whether it's a whole roomful of 100 people focusing in on a specific issue area or policy initiative. So just remember as you're preparing to plan your workshop that an advocacy workshop is really anything that gives people the tools to make an impact and advocate for themselves for their communities or on behalf of a particular issue area.

So once you've decided that you want to plan an advocacy workshop in your community, really the first step is deciding what topic or issue you want your workshop to focus on. And this topic or issue can be as broad as how to get civically engaged in your community and beyond, or you can choose to focus in on a specific issue area. But it is really important that no matter what you decide you're very clear on what your topic is and how broad the scope of your workshop is going to be. And if you aren't sure where to begin or what topic you want your workshop to focus on, think about the issues that lie at the intersection of three things. The first thing is your personal passions: what issues are you personally most passionate about working on and talking about? The second thing is your expertise: think about the issues or the areas or the topics that you have experience in personally or professionally and where your expertise lies within the advocacy field or on a particular issue area. And then lastly what is most urgent in your community right now: what are issues that are timely that you think need more attention or where resources aren't currently being allocated? Really focusing on the three areas of passion, expertise, and urgency and what meets all three of those criteria will really help you to focus in on a topic or an issue area to focus on for your advocacy workshop.

So once you've decided on your focus topic the next step is to think about the goal for your workshop. Think about what you want your participants and your audience members to take away after attending; this might be certain actions that you want to see them take or certain things that you want them to have learned. But making sure that you are clearly outlining the goals for your workshop is going to be super helpful in guiding the rest of your planning process. And beyond just the individual level, when you're thinking about the goals for your workshop also think about what you want to see change in your community as a result of you doing this program. What is the larger community impact that you hope to see? And once you have these goals outlined make sure that they're clear enough that they'll be easy to refer back to every step of this planning process so that everything that you're doing as you plan this workshop is in service of achieving these goals, both for your participants and also for the impact that you want to make on your community through your advocacy workshop and through your program.

So the next step in your planning process should really be thinking about who you're trying to reach and what you want your audience to look like. And it's really crucial that this is one

of the first things that you're doing because every part of the planning process that comes afterwards will determine whether or not you're actually able to reach the folks who you intend to reach. So making sure that you're really intentional about who you want in the room is a really important part of this process. Especially if you're trying to reach a really broad group of people, as we often do at All In Together working with voting age women, make sure that you're still being really intentional and taking a moment to think about how to make this program truly accessible to everyone because you know it's not always enough just to make the program free. There are definitely other barriers that it's important to think about. So just making sure that you're intentionally thinking about questions like, do I need translation services? Or do I need to translate my written materials or my presentation materials? Do I need to provide child care or transportation? Is my venue accessible to public transportation or buses or free parking? And even things as simple as clarifying a dress code or that casual dress is appropriate is sometimes the difference between someone feeling comfortable attending your event and someone who is not. So just making sure that all of these pieces are things that you've thought about is a really important part of determining who you truly want to reach and making sure that that happens.

And part of making sure that your event is accessible to everyone is thinking about where you actually want to hold your workshop. So thinking about the location, the venue, and the size of the room are all really important factors. When you're looking at venue options in your area revisit your goals for your workshop and think about what type of space is going to be most conducive to achieving those goals. Do you want a smaller venue that provides a more intimate space? Do you need breakout areas where people can have private or small group conversations? Or do you want something a little bit bigger that's more of a theater setup? So even thinking about how you want the room to be able to set up is often a really important part of setting up your event in a way that is conducive to your goals and creating the right energy in the room depending on again who you want your audience to be and what types of topics and content you're going to want to cover.

Also definitely make sure that you're considering the size of the room so that it's not too big or too small depending on how big you want your audience to be. And because if you have a really big room that's set up for 60 people and you have a workshop of 25 people you know that room is going to feel really empty but if you have a room set up for 50 people and then you have 100 people show up and you definitely don't want to be turning people away at the door and you definitely want to make sure that during your registration process that you're keeping track of capacity as people are signing up and you're reaching your capacity limit. And if you do end up wanting to hold your workshop at a venue that does cost money to rent out you can always ask them whether they're willing to consider donating the space or giving it to you at a non-profit rate or being labeled as a partner and so donating the space in that way but definitely be open to having those conversations with venues. Just because they have a certain price listed on their website, definitely don't be discouraged and and still feel like you could reach out and ask them what your options are. Because a lot of venues, especially smaller venues, will be willing to be flexible and work with you depending on your budget and your needs and depending on what the purpose of the workshop is for. So definitely always had those conversations with folks as your options come up.

[00:07:43] And while you're looking for venues especially if you're looking for a venue that is going to be free, definitely check out public libraries or academic spaces at a college or university or even a technical college or community college in your town because they often have spaces that you can rent out for free or at a price that's much lower than if you

go with a formal venue. Get creative and feel free to think outside of the box when you're thinking about what type of space is going to work best for your workshop. And you can also even think about spaces that might be held by nonprofit organizations or by community organizations especially if that organization's work is related to the topic that you want to cover for your workshop and invite them to participate and to act as a partner and to send their community to your event.

[00:08:39] You know that's even better and you're not only getting a free venue space but you're also creating a space where folks are used to coming when they're talking about this particular issue area or topic. And so you're also recruiting audience members while setting up your venue. So just keeping all of those options in mind and being creative and being willing to have conversations with venues and how you can work things out to make it practical for you and for your purposes is really important and a really important first step or one of your first steps in this planning process.

And the last really important point that I want to make about choosing a venue is always make sure to ask the venue what their A/V capabilities are. Will you be able to use a projector? What does their screen look like? Do they have microphones and if so how many? And what type and what does their speaker system look like? Asking those A/V questions upfront is really important because every venue is different and some venues the A/V is included in the rental and for some of them you'll have to pay extra per microphone or you may have to contract in an A/V company to come in if you want those capabilities and that can really impact the price of the venue rental. At the end of the day, making sure that as you are having these conversations with different venues that you're asking questions about A/V and just being upfront about what your A/V needs are going to look like and what the presentation and the content is going to look like is also a really important part of the of the venue selection process.

Okay, so while you're looking for venues it's also really important to be thinking about what dates you're looking at and what days of the week and how long you want your workshop to run for. Do you want it to be a two hour long workshop? Do you want it to be a half day workshop? Do you want it to be an hour? You know thinking about the time span, the day of the week, the time of the day, and the actual date you want to hold your workshop on is also obviously a really important part of the early planning process and oftentimes will in part be determined by when your venue is available. But it shouldn't just be when the venue is available. You should also be thinking about your audience and again who you're trying to reach and thinking intentionally about what times of day work best for people. Do people have childcare responsibilities on weekends? And if so you know not necessarily that you can't hold your workshop on a weekend but you may have to think about things like childcare, or when our kids on school breaks, or making sure that you're being really mindful of different religious holidays. Making sure that you're looking at the calendar thoroughly and picking a date that works but also picking a time of the week and the time of the day that works in striking a balance between having enough time to cover everything that you want to cover during your workshop and not taking up too much more time than you actually need because of course you know people are busy and the longer your workshop, is the bigger time commitment it will take from someone to actually attend.

[00:11:55] So now that you have your venue and your date and your goals for your workshop outlined the last basic piece of the planning process and before getting into the content of what you actually want to do during a workshop is picking a title for your workshop that's going to be descriptive enough that you know when you're telling people to come to your workshop they understand sort of the gist of what you plan to cover and

it's simple enough that it's easy for people to remember, and easy for you to send out in an email, and put on a flyer and have people understand what you plan to do. So once you have all of that said it's time for you to go ahead and make your Eventbrite page.

Eventbrite, if you haven't used it before, is a tool that allows you to create a registration page and to put in information about your event so that people can visit your Eventbrite and register and get all of the logistical information like the day and the address and how long your event is going to be and claim the registration so that you can track how many folks are registered, how big your audience is going to be. You can continue to update that page as you confirm details like speakers or partner organizations that are going to join you and Eventbrite also gives you the ability to communicate with folks who have registered so Eventbrite will automatically generate a reminder email that they'll send out to folks the day before your event. You can also send a follow up email to your attendees through Eventbrite. So it's a really great really easy to use tool and all you have to do is go to Eventbrite.com and create your own account, which is totally free to do, and then you can create your event page. And like I said put in all of your event details you can add a cover photo if you want and then it's a really easy way for you to just share that link with folks and be able to have them register and be committed to come into your event. And it also adds that extra layer of accountability so that people don't just say "yeah you know I'd love to come" and then when the day actually rolls around they for they forget and then they don't show up. So having folks actually register and requiring a registration for them to attend helps with your drop off rates so that people actually do show up on the day of your event. And so you can be prepared and be aware of the number of folks who are going to end up coming.

[00:14:25] Okay. So now I'm going to switch gears a little bit and talk about the actual content of your workshop. So the first step in planning your workshop content is obviously just sketching out a skeleton of your run of show. So just you know a brief schematic outline of the things that you hope to cover during your event in your run up show which is basically you know your event agenda can definitely shift throughout this process. So don't feel like you know you're tied to it just because you've created a first draft but it is important and helpful that during the beginning of this planning process you are just creating a brief outline to guide you as you're thinking about doing things like speaker outreach and pulling in partners or experts to come help you do this presentation. So just drafting that drafting that at the beginning of this process and before doing any of those extra steps is really helpful. And as you get closer to your event and you have your finalized run of show in hand making sure that every component of your program or at least a lot of the components of your program are action-oriented is really important. And again revisit the goals that you outlined at the very beginning of this process and make sure that all of the content is aimed at achieving those goals. What are the actions that you want people to take away? And you know if it's information that you're really just trying to disseminate what do you want people to do with that information, and what actions might come from people learning more about this issue area or this particular initiative that you want to talk about?

And once this run of show is finalized, consider how you might share this with attendees. It doesn't have to be every single detail of the program, but it is often helpful for folks to understand what the program looks like even if it's just a handful of bullet points on your slide deck at the beginning of your presentation or if you want to print it out as an agenda or if you want to add to some of the components to your Eventbrite, it's helpful for folks and enticing for folks when they're thinking about whether or not they want to come, for them to have a better idea of what it is their walking into, what you plan to cover and what you plan

for them to get out of attending your program. And really important that a component of this finalized run of show is having the actual times of all of the different elements of your program outline. So for example from 3 to 3:10 doing this part of the presentation and then from 3:10 to 3:30 and so on. But having these actual timestamps and timing laid out is going to be really helpful for you day of so that you can make sure that things are running on schedule so that if you have someone scheduled to speak at a certain time you're not running too far ahead or too far behind so that everything ends on time and starts on time. And so that you're making sure that you know of course you want to be respectful of your audience this time and of your speaker's time so making sure that you have that tick tock in place so that day of again you can sort of monitor the flow of the event and if you need to speed things up or slow things down that you're able to do that.

Which brings me to the next really important component of this planning process, which is Speaker outreach. So finding the people that you want to invite to come speak whether it's on a panel, or if you want to do a couple mini keynote speeches during your program, you know totally up to you and if you don't want to invite speakers you certainly don't have to. But if you do want to recruit more folks to come and help you with your presentation or invite experts to come and talk about their work, speaker outreach is a really important part of this process. And so a couple of just best practices for speaker outreach as far as timeline, you know we always try to reach out to speakers for our events between four to six weeks before the event date. So reaching out with plenty of time so that you have, you know enough time to find the right folks, but also that you get on people's calendars early enough and especially if it's someone who you have never met, just making sure that you give them enough time so that it's a respectful invitation. And so it's not asking them to show up to something tomorrow is obviously going to increase your chances that they will actually be able to join you.

And if it is someone like I mentioned who you have never met before it's totally appropriate for you to email them an invitation just a cold email, or if you know if you can get a warm introduction even better but don't be afraid to email people who you don't know personally and just make sure that in doing that of course that your invitation is respectful and that you're outlining you know an introduction to who you are and an introduction and summary of what the event is all about. How many people do you hope to reach? What is the date? what time are you asking them to come and speak for, and what are you asking them to speak about? So is it a panel discussion or is it a keynote? And if it is something where they're going to be speaking alongside other people you know giving them an idea of who else is going to be speaking is always really helpful for folks especially if they're going to be serving on a panel. So just making sure that all of those details are in your initial email invitation to them is always going to be really helpful and going to give you the best chance that they will be able to join you.

And if you are inviting an elected official to join your event to speak it's a little bit different of a process. So I would definitely recommend that your first step be calling their office and asking for the information of whoever it is that handles their schedule. So it's totally appropriate for you to call your representatives office and just say "Hi my name is Clare I'm playing an event and I would love to extend an invitation to my representative to speak. Can you please give me the email address and the name for their scheduler?" And then they will most likely do that unless they handle their scheduling online and if they do that they'll let you know how to submit a request. But then getting that email address and emailing their scheduler as early as possible because of course you know our representatives' schedules are often very busy. But if you make sure to give them enough time and make sure to adequately explain who it is that's going to be at this event. You

know why it's important that they come. You know there's a very good chance that they will respond and especially if you're working with a local elected official, a very good chance that they'll want to join you and be a part of that discussion. I definitely encourage you to reach out to your elected officials. Even if your workshop isn't directly tied to how to contact your officials or how to contact you know people at the State House or whatever, having that added component of having one of your representatives join to talk about related initiatives that they're working on in the community or even just to talk about things like how folks can get in contact with them in an impactful way and why they really do want to hear from their constituents about this issue and in why that they are why they are concerned with this issue area is often a really powerful component to add to an advocacy workshop. So I would definitely encourage you to invite your elected officials know local state federal and even their staffers if they aren't available they may offer to send a member of their staff who works on this issue area. And that's also a great component add to your event. So we definitely again encourage you to reach out to your officials offices and invite them to join you.

Once you have your speakers confirmed it's really important that you're following up with them right before the event or in the week leading up to the event to make sure that they have all the information they need to show up, where you want them to show up, when you want them to show up and to be prepared to talk about what you want them to talk about so that can look like anything from a formal speaker prep kit. That's something that we do a lot of the time for our larger scale events which just really looks like you know a digital PDF where you're laying out all of the arrival logistics and who is their point of contact giving them a phone number in case something comes up if they're on a panel just laying out what those panel questions look like and also telling them who they're going to be speaking beside. And people always like to know that. So if they are going to be speaking alongside someone on a panel I'm just making sure that you include that information whether, this information is in a formal speaker preparation packet or if you just want to send them an email and that's fine as well. But making sure that they have all of the logistics that they need in order to show up at your event like I said on time when you want them to to where you want them to and to be prepared to talk about the topic that you're hoping for them to cover.

And I think even beyond sending them information via email or via speaker prep kit it's always really helpful to go through the information with them over the phone. So asking them if you can schedule a speaker prep call with them in the week leading up to the event is a really great way to touch base with them especially if it's someone who you have never met in person before especially if it's your first contact other than email just hopping on the phone with them asking for a quick 15 minute meeting over the phone to just talk through any questions they might have and to give them a verbal overview again of the event even if you've told them already and emailing are always helpful to just discuss it with them over the phone so that they have an idea of what they're walking into and just giving them some space to ask questions. I mean even if you have sent them a formal packet you know they might not have had time to read it thoroughly so just verbally going over all the details with them and just making sure that you have the information that you need from them in case anything comes up dig up or if they're running late. So making sure that you have details like what is your speaker's day of contact information how can you get in contact with them if they're running late or you need to call them the morning of to making sure that you have a cell phone number for them or if you're working with an elected official making sure you have a phone number for their staff is also really important.

[00:24:54] So the other outreach component is obviously outreach to potential attendees. So actually getting people to show up to the awesome workshop that you've planned is a really important part of this process because you know programming is only impactful and people actually are able to attend and receive it. And so being thoughtful about how you can reach your particular audience is really important because. For some people email invitations are great. But some people want to see a Facebook event or need a printed out flyer that's posted on a bulletin board. So just thinking about where your community shows up. Do they have Internet access? Do they not? Are they on Facebook? Are they not? All of those questions are going to inform how you're gonna get the attention of your potential audience members and get them to register and show up to your event.

So something that we always recommend that people do aside from creating their event page is create a promotional flyer so this doesn't have to be anything super complicated is just a flyer. I mean you can use free design programs like Canva that is super super user friendly and easy to use and again free to use so creating a flyer just that has you know basic information like the name of your event a basic event description of what people will get out of it if they do decide to come you know telling them if it's free. If there is a cost to registering all of that information that's gonna get their attention and going to be easy for folks to pass along. And just making sure that if you do create a flyer that you're including the registration link somewhere on there is really important. And on Eventbrite, you can also create a shortened link so that it's a short length that's easy to copy and paste that you can customize and make clean and that's easy to put on something like a flyer. And if you do have an audience that you think would be responsive to an email invitation, email invitations are great. They're easy to forward. So just typing out like a basic forward friendly email invitation that it has all of the information that you put on your flyer is also a really effective thing to do. And then having that both email invitation and your flyer and sending that out to your contacts and ask them to help you spread the word so they might be connected to people or organizations that are interested in the issue area that you're going to cover at your workshop. And just ask them you know to forward it to five of their friends or or whatever who might be interested in joining you.

And aside from your personal contacts and aside from just asking individuals in your network to share the information about your event, I also encourage you to do a quick search for local community organizations who do work that is aligned with what you're going to cover at your workshop and who work with communities who you think would be interested in joining you. So working with those local community organizations and reaching out to them and just saying, "hey you know I'm organizing an advocacy workshop on this day and I would love for your staff and community to join" often is a really great way to get people to show up and especially if you're working on a particular issue area and you want people who are working in that space to come or even if you want to invite them to speak or whatever or all of the above. I definitely would encourage you to reach out the folks who are working in the space in your community and as you're doing all of this outreach both to community organizations and to individuals. The key really is to follow up so don't be afraid to email someone and if you don't hear from them you know a week later or a couple of weeks later feel free to just bump it for them and just in a respectful way say "hey just want to remind you you know this workshop is coming up and I would love to see you there" because you know all of our inboxes get crazy especially if you're relying on email and sometimes people just miss the first invitation and it's perfectly fine and really important that you're following up with folks.

And then the last thing that I would encourage you to do as far as attendee outreach is reaching out to local media organizations and even you know new media organizations

that are primarily on Instagram or wherever they're showing off depending on who you're trying to reach and especially if they have events calendars just asking if they would be willing to share your event on their calendar or asking you if they do have a community calendar for events and whether or not they would be willing to put your your event or your workshop on that calendar is also a really great way to recruit attendees but also to encourage local media to come to your event. So you know that is a great way to record your impact and to gain more attention for the issue area that you're covering with your workshop is inviting local media and local journalists to join you and talk to you about your event. You do an interview the morning of and not only will that help you get attendees but it will help you amplify your impact in the community.

So one of the last steps in planning your workshop and making sure that you know you're creating impact and creating impacts in a sustainable way for workshops to come is to make sure that you're surveying your participants to see how things went. So doing a follow up survey, whether it's a printed survey that you give to folks you know before they leave your workshop at the end of your workshop, or if you want to follow up through email or include a link to a digital follow up survey in your follow up email to folks. It's really important that you're gathering feedback so that you can learn how you can grow as an organizer as a presenter, and what was meaningful to folks you know, what did people want to see or want to learn next so that you can use all of that information in your organizing efforts going forward. And you know as far as the difference between doing a physical paper survey and a digital survey it's just important to know that you know anytime you do a digital survey for folks you're not going to get the majority of people to fill it out. And so I would definitely encourage you if you can to print out a survey ahead of time and just give it to folks while they're still in the room and ask people to fill it out at the end of the workshop and then collect it on their way out.

And then like I mentioned earlier when we're talking about Eventbrite you know it's really easy and really important through Eventbrite to send a follow up email to your attendees into your participants. So just creating an email thanking them for joining you and also including a call to action. So what do you want to see them do after this workshop and how do you plan to stay connected to them? Should they be involved in your organization or will you be planning more workshops in the future? Or you know maybe if they have an idea or an initiative that they want to talk to you about how can they get in contact with you? And so just thinking about how you want to frame your follow up email what resources you want to include. Do you want to attach the slide deck so that people can refer back to it or resources that you shared? Just making sure that you get that set ahead of time so that after your event ends or within 24 hours or 48 hours of your event ending you're able to catch folks while you still have their attention and send that follow up email and make sure that you're giving folks a way to stay connected to you in the future.

Alright, so that was our step by step guide on how to create your own advocacy workshop in your community. If you do have more questions or if you want guidance on how to plan your own advocacy workshop, or if there are questions that you have that we didn't cover today definitely feel free to reach out to us at All In Together at info@aitogether.org or directly to me at cplatt@aitogether.org. I hope that this has been a helpful introduction helping you to think about getting started planning your own advocacy workshop in your community.