



## Event Handbook

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# Event Handbook



## Introduction

Congratulations and thank you for participating in National School Choice Week in a very influential way – by hosting an event or meeting. We are here to help you make your event as successful as possible. This Handbook offers basic planning information, ideas and inspiration for planning and promoting your event.

You can follow our 9 simple steps to planning a successful event, while learning more about school choice. Your event, combined with other events across the country, is what will bring the message of National School Choice Week to millions of Americans! Be sure to check our website for additional resources and updates, or send an email to [outreach@schoolchoiceweek.com](mailto:outreach@schoolchoiceweek.com) if you have questions.

And finally, don't forget to send us photographs from your event! Just email them to us at [photos@schoolchoiceweek.com](mailto:photos@schoolchoiceweek.com) so that we may promote your involvement.

## NSCW Event Planning Checklist

Use this checklist to help organize a successful event. Remember, we are here to help. Please email us at [outreach@schoolchoiceweek.com](mailto:outreach@schoolchoiceweek.com) with any questions. We have suggested deadlines below to help you plan your event. If you are planning a smaller event, these deadlines may not apply. Good luck!

### ***Recommended complete by the end of November***

- Determine what type of event
- Select date and time for event
- Secure venue based on realistic attendance estimates
- Post your event on the NSCW website
- Contact speakers or VIPs who you would like to invite
- Recruit host committee to help you build attendance

### ***Recommended complete by mid-December***

- Mail and/or email invitations
- Begin event publicity via newspaper, social media, newsletters
- Set up travel arrangements for any VIPs or speakers
- Develop a rough agenda for the event
- Line up refreshments
- Recruit volunteers (check-in, refreshments, photography, distributing handouts, etc)
- Talk to people about your upcoming event to build interest

### ***1 week before event***

- Send a reminder to all potential attendees
- Finalize plans with your volunteers
- Finalize program agenda

### ***Day before event***

- Call media outlets to remind them of your event
- Send one last reminder to all possible attendees
- Confirm any last-minute details with venue and volunteers

## **Step 1: Decide what type of event to host**

National School Choice Week is meant for everyone. Whether you host a house party with 5 friends or organize a rally for 5,000, each event is important and every event counts. In previous years, we saw a wide variety of events, both large and small. Here are just a few ideas:

- Talk about school choice at a meeting that is already on your calendar.
- Host a breakfast or lunch to discuss school choice policy.
- Host a coffee house or pub night discussion.
- Arrange a school choice movie screening.
- Hold a poster or essay contest, along with an awards ceremony, for nearby students.
- Recognize star teachers at a press conference.
- Host an open house to raise awareness among parents of the education options available to their kids.

But don't be confined by these ideas. Additional suggestions are available on the Resources section of our website.

## **Step 2: Determine and secure a venue**

Depending upon the type of event you choose to host, you will need a place to hold it. It may be that your living room is the perfect place to have a few friends over to discuss the issues. If you foresee a larger event, check locally for available spaces. Many public libraries, recreation centers, schools and churches offer meeting space at reasonable rates. For small groups, restaurants may have private rooms available at no extra charge. And if you plan to hold a large event such as a rally, be sure to check for any rules or regulations that must be followed for large public gatherings. Find out what dates your selected venue is available during the Week and use that information to plan the details of your event.

## **Step 3: Plan your event agenda**

Next, it's time to determine what will happen at your event. You may want to invite a guest speaker with some knowledge of school choice. Local celebrities, elected officials, and notable athletes can be good draws. Consider inviting parents, students and teachers to speak, or host a student musical performance at your event.

Then, determine the best time to hold the event during National School Choice Week. This should be based upon the availability of the venue and a date and time when your intended audience and the local news media are most likely to attend such an event.

## **Step 4: Post your event on the NSCW website**

To post your event, go to our website at [www.schoolchoiceweek.com](http://www.schoolchoiceweek.com) and click on the "Post Your Event" button on the home page. Simply follow the easy steps onscreen.

You will also be able to utilize our social media tools to publicize your event. The success of your event will be in the numbers of people who attend and show their support. The more exposure your event gets, the better. That's why you'll find easy-to-use tools to share your event through social media and email on our website.

## **Step 5: Secure sponsorship for your event**

Many events during National School Choice Week are planned with little or no funding at all. However, if you need to raise money to hold your event, consider: who is most likely to see the value in promoting school choice? Local foundations, individuals and businesses may see it as an opportunity to advance an important issue.

One of the best things to do is to identify some supporters of such causes and ask them to underwrite a portion of the expenses. Share the budget, estimate attendance and potential media coverage, and explain that what you are doing locally will build on the greater school choice movement.

Additionally, seek out local businesses who may be able to help sponsor in return for advertising or by promoting your event at their place of business. Oftentimes venue operators, caterers or photographers will give a discounted rate to help the cause. And, be willing to promote your sponsors – including helpful vendors – so they get an added boost of free advertising.

To reach individual supporters, consider creating a “crowdfunding” campaign on [gofundme.com](http://gofundme.com).

Bottom line: Be creative in trying to secure underwriting support.

## **Step 6: Send invitations by mail or email**

For an invitation, regardless of its distribution means, you will want to include the basic information:

- Name of the event and a description of the activities
- Event location, date and time
- Cost, if applicable
- RSVP instructions (email, phone, mail, Facebook, etc.)
- RSVP deadline, giving yourself enough time for final preparations
- Contact information (email, phone, mail, etc.)

If you are planning to email the invitation, consider like-minded groups who will help you promote the event to their followers/members. If you have printed invitations, carry some with you to give to interested people you may run into during your daily travels. And, take advantage of the social media tools available on the NSCW website to promote your event with Facebook, Twitter and email.

## **Step 7: Make your event stand out**

We are very excited to help promote and brand your event with this Event Kit!

The materials in this Kit are essential to link your unique event with the thousands of other celebrations taking place during the Week. The bright visuals and compelling branding also help to make your event significantly more attractive to the news media.

Make sure to prominently feature the embroidered yellow scarves, rally signs and other materials at your event.

## **Step 8: Publicize your event**

There are many ways to publicize your event. This list should give you some good ideas to get started.

### **Posters**

Some Event Kits include 11x17-inch promotional posters with space to add your specific event information. Display the posters in the windows of coffee shops, convenience stores, gas stations, your local library, schools and churches, etc., to generate interest.

### **Local media**

Contact your local TV and radio stations and newspapers with event information. If the event is free and open to the public, be sure to emphasize that.

### **Social media**

Because social media is such an important vehicle to promote your event, you will find easy-to-use tools on our website. Tweet about your event, and use Facebook and Instagram to build interest and share your photos – all using the hashtag #SCW.

### **Media interviews**

If you have a VIP speaker, offer preview interviews to the local newspaper. Not only does it help to get the event into the minds of local reporters, but it can also serve as free advertising. Be certain to approve the offer with your speaker first and check calendars to determine available times for interviews.

### **Network**

Think about like-minded organizations that might be willing to send an email to their members or post it on their Facebook page to help build attendance.

## **Talk to people!**

You may be surprised to find out how many people know of other people with a genuine interest in school choice. Bring it up in conversation at the kids' soccer game or at your book club meeting. This is a grassroots issue that is often best shared from person to person. Talking to people can be a great opportunity to add potential attendees to your invitation list.

## **Step 9: Take photos at your event**

During your event, be sure to have someone responsible for taking photographs of the festivities, including attendees and speakers. Make sure you use a good camera that takes high-resolution digital images. After your event, share your photos on social media using the hashtags #SCW and #schoolchoice, and email your photos to us at:

**[photos@schoolchoiceweek.com](mailto:photos@schoolchoiceweek.com)**

These photos may be featured on our social media accounts and are essential for showing the broad support for school choice. Some suggestions? Include an American flag in the shot, or show a local landmark in the background to visually identify where the event was held. Feature NSCW branded rally signs or scarves to show your event's unity with the national movement.

### **Important to note:**

NSCW often uses event photos in our promotional materials. However, we cannot use low quality images or photos taken with older mobile phones. Please be sure to get high-resolution images on a good camera and send them to [photos@schoolchoiceweek.com](mailto:photos@schoolchoiceweek.com).

## School Choice Definitions

School choice means empowering parents with the freedom to choose the best educational environments for their children – from traditional public schools to public charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, online learning, and homeschooling. The following are definitions of school choice policies and programs that are frequently discussed during National School Choice Week.

Remember: each state and locality has different policies.

### **Public School Open Enrollment**

Open enrollment policies provide increased education options within traditional public schooling. Open enrollment allows parents to select the best public schools for their children, regardless of where those schools are located. Depending on the state or local open enrollment policy, this means that parents can choose any public school within a district (intra-district school choice) or, in some cases, outside of their home district (inter-district school choice).

### **Public Charter Schools**

Charter schools are independent public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative, while being held strictly accountable for improving student achievement. Charter schools are always public schools and are always tuition-free. These schools are created (chartered) in different ways, depending on state law. Some are opened by school districts, while other states allow mayors, universities, and nonprofit groups to create charter schools. These schools are open to all children – students are selected at random.

### **Magnet Schools**

Magnet schools are public schools that are operated by school districts or groups of school districts. Magnet schools are tuition-free and have a focused theme and aligned curriculum such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), Fine and Performing Arts, or International Baccalaureate.

### **Private School Choice**

Private school choice programs empower parents to use state-funded opportunity scholarships, refundable tax credits, corporate-funded scholarships or education savings accounts to send their children to qualifying private schools. These programs are created by individual states.

Some private school choice policies are relatively universal (allowing all children to participate), while others are targeted to assist low- and middle-income families, children who would otherwise attend failing public schools, or children with special learning needs.

Most of these programs have rigorous accountability guidelines to ensure that schools meet standards for safety, fiscal soundness, and non-discrimination. Programs include:

**Opportunity scholarship programs**, also called school voucher programs, which allow parents to use all or part of the tax funding set aside for their children’s education to send their children to private schools.

**Tax credit scholarship programs**, which allow individuals or corporations to receive dollar-for-dollar tax credits for donating to qualifying nonprofit scholarship organizations that offer private school tuition assistance.

**Personal tax credits and deductions**, which allow parents who send their children to private school to receive a state income tax credit, or a deduction, for private school tuition as well as books, supplies, computers, tutors or transportation.

**Education savings accounts**, which allow parents to use tax funding for their children’s education, to customize their children’s educational experiences by paying for tuition or other educational expenses.

Continued

## Virtual Schools and Online Learning

Virtual schools are Internet-based academies that teach students entirely or primarily through a rigorous online curriculum. These schools can be state-operated, district-run public schools, public charter schools, magnet schools, or privately operated schools. In some cases, online learning is combined with traditional, in-classroom education, called “blended learning.” Publicly-operated virtual schools hold children to the same academic standards and requirements as traditional public schools.

## Homeschooling

Homeschooling is the process of parents educating children in the home. This method of education is becoming increasingly popular in the United States, with many homeschooling families participating in local or regional homeschooling groups to augment in-home learning. All states permit homeschooling, and many states require standardized test scores, curriculum approval, and professional evaluation of students.

## Available resources and templates

As part of our efforts to support event planners, the National School Choice Week website offers many resources and templates that you can download and use to learn more about school choice and make your event great. See what National School Choice Week can offer for event ideas, event promotion, and how to get media coverage. We continually work to add more, so check our website for updates.

**Be sure to visit our website and check for resource updates!**



**You** can  
shine the spotlight  
on effective  
education options  
for every child!



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