

Watch Party Toolkit

Local watch parties are a key strategy for increasing the reach and impact of the YWomenVote National Town Hall on September 7, 2024 – *and* a great way to raise awareness about your organization, the reasons that voting is important, and specific roles and actions individuals can take to get involved in the upcoming election.

This Watch Party Toolkit provides suggestions for making your Watch Party as successful as possible. Starting with your planning before the event through your day-of execution and post-event follow up, you'll find tips and strategies for actively engaging your audience, guidance for staying nonpartisan, sample runs of show, and more. Questions? Email YWomenVotePartners@ywca.org.

Key Benefits and Requirements

Benefits

- Educate your community about voting, elections, and their impact on your community
- Deepen relationships with partner organizations
- Raise the profile of your organization in your community
- Mobilize current and former organization members and partners

Requirements

- Potential costs associated with securing promotional items, venue, AV equipment, etc.
- Staffing capacity to plan and implement
- Audiovisual connectivity to the livestream of the YWomenVote National Town Hall

Before Your Event

Register your watch party: Make sure your event appears on the YWomenVote National Town Hall Watch Party Map by completing this [watch party registration form](#).

Choose a location: Choosing the right location for your watch party depends on who you'd like to attend and the environment you want to create. Has your community had events like this in the past? Are you hoping to entice community activists or young voters, or community members who may never have voted before? Find a space that is comfortable and welcoming for your guests. Ensure the space is fully accessible for attendees with special needs. To ensure that you stay 501(c)(3) compliant, choose a neutral site for your event – one that is not associated with any political party, candidate, or strong political advocacy for an issue.

Make sure your local guests can see and hear the livestream *and each other*: Make sure you have access to a large enough monitor for your audience to see and a sufficient sound system for them to hear the livestream. You may want to rent this or secure a space (perhaps by partnering with a local community college or other community partner) that already has this on site.

Ensure accessibility for all attendees: Planning for accessibility early in the planning process ensures that everyone can fully participate in an event. The [Autistic Advocacy Network's comprehensive toolkit](#) can assist you in thinking through the necessary components to create an accessible event.

Choose your issue focus and GOTV activation: The YWomenVote National Town Hall will cover a variety of issues and activations. At your watch party, you may want to choose a specific issue to focus on that is particularly important in your community. And we encourage *all* watch parties to plan local GOTV activations for attendees to participate in. Activations could include:

- Filling out this downloadable [“I vote because I care about...” sign](#) and
 - Posting a selfie on social media with a message that encourages others to participate in the 2024 election
 - Texting friends and family to remind them to register to vote or check to make sure they are registered, and inviting them to join you in voting on election day
- Registering to vote and checking your registration to vote at [Vote411](#)
- Making a [voting plan](#)
- Completing a [pledge to vote](#)
- Join voter registration efforts in your community for [National Voter Registration Day](#)
- [Sign up to be a poll worker](#)

Check out the [GOTV ideas in this toolkit](#), and choose an activation that is relevant to your audience and that your organization has the capacity to undertake.

Develop your Press Plan: Develop and execute your press strategy. Make a list of all media sources (online, print, radio, etc.) you would like to promote or cover the event. Follow-up on any media releases you send. Designate a spokesperson who is well-versed in the 501(c)(3) considerations described below.

Go Digital: As with all events in the digital age, take the time to develop and execute a social media plan to promote your event. [These graphics](#) are easy to share and [this social media toolkit](#) provides sample language you can customize for your watch party; just add the details for your local event to the post. There's even space for you to [insert your logo on these graphics](#). Make sure to review Nonprofit Vote's [Using Social Media to Promote Voting: Guidance for 501\(c\)\(3\) Organizations](#) to ensure you stay within 501(c) guidelines. The Town Hall will be live streamed at ywomenvote.org/townhall.

Advertise and invite: Advertise on social media, put up flyers, and send emails announcing your watch party. Consider sending personal invitations to individuals in your community, such as long-time organizational supporters. Compile a list of partners who can promote the event through their communications. Use the digital graphics (above) to help get the word out.

Develop your local run of show: The YWomenVote National Town Hall will include three distinct parts:

- 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. ET: Pre-Show featuring a DJ and remarks by sponsoring organizations
- 2 p.m. - 3:20 p.m. ET: Gen Z Panel Discussion
- 3:20 p.m. - 4 p.m. ET: Presidential Candidate Forum

You will need to build out your local agenda with an eye toward which parts of the national program you want your group to listen in on, and when you may want local speakers, local discussion, or a participant GOTV activity for audience engagement. For example, your local run of show might look like the following:

- 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. ET: Local Speakers and GOTV activity
Instead of viewing the pre-show livestream, you could have local speakers and a GOTV activity such as: GOTV button making; "why I vote" signs and selfies; make a plan to vote activity; text 5 friends to vote activity; see ideas above.
- 2 p.m. - 3:20 p.m. ET: Gen Z Panel Discussion
View the first 45 minutes of the livestream, then have local discussion
or
Facilitate your own local discussion (this provides more control over the topics discussed - see the note for 501(c)(3) organizations below)
- 3:20 p.m. - 4 p.m. ET: Presidential Candidate Forum
View the livestream, followed by nonpartisan local discussion
- 4 p.m. - 4:15 p.m. ET: Closing Remarks and Call to Action

Alternatively, your run of show could be:

- 1:30 p.m. - 2 p.m. ET: Gather and Welcome
- 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. ET: View livestream
To keep attendees engaged and active, set up GOTV activations/activities around the room that attendees can undertake as they listen to the National Town Hall Panel Discussion and Presidential Candidate Forum
- 4 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. ET: Local Discussion and Wrap-Up / Call to Action

It's absolutely *your call* as to how to balance your local engagement and GOTV activation with the livestream of the National Town Hall.

A Note for 501(c)(3) Organizations:

- If your organization does not have a track record of working on or taking a position on a particular issue, it is not recommended that you begin to do so at this juncture so close in time to the 2024 election.
- A variety of issues may be discussed during the course of the National Town Hall, including: abortion and reproductive health; gun violence; climate change; diversity, equity and inclusion; racial justice; gender equity; threats to democracy; gender identity; gender-based violence; childcare; women's economic security; and more. It is also possible for unexpected issues to be raised during Q&A.
- If you are concerned about an issue being focused on (particularly during the panel discussion) that is outside of your organization's established record, consider utilizing the alternative run of show suggested above to utilize the panel discussion time for a locally-focused conversation on issues that your organization is comfortable exploring.
- As always, consult counsel or check in with **Bolder Advocacy** for additional guidance.

The Event

Set up the environment: Creating an accessible, engaging space to make your participants feel comfortable will be crucial to hosting an impactful watch party. Get to the event location early to make sure it is set up so that everyone can access the space and see, hear, or otherwise engage in the event. If you plan to have a dialogue, speaking program, or activation, make sure the space is set up so that participants can engage with each element of the watch party. This may include providing microphones to help amplify speakers so that all (especially those with hearing challenges) can fully participate.

Stay 501(c)(3) compliant: As a nonprofit organization, it is *essential* that you abide by IRS rules regarding 501(c)(3) organizations *at all times*. Here are some tips for keeping your watch party nonpartisan from our friends at [Nonprofit Vote](#):

- Prepare your speakers in advance to remain neutral and focused on nonpartisan civic engagement/get out the vote messages.
- While not required, you may want to ask audience members to check their partisan materials (including buttons and signs) at the door. This helps to create a sense of nonpartisanship within your watch party.
- Ask the audience to respectfully refrain from excessive exuberance for or against a particular candidate or political party.
- If any of your speakers express support for or opposition to a candidate or political party, the host or moderator should immediately step in; reiterate that this is a nonpartisan forum and that [your organization] does not support or oppose any candidates for office; and redirect the discussion. The host or moderator can also acknowledge that it can be difficult to keep one's personal views separate from the nonpartisan discussion, but that your focus is on encouraging full civic participation by everyone. Our democracy needs everyone to participate in voting.

Introductions and opening remarks: As your participants get settled, take the opportunity to welcome and thank them for attending. It's important to acknowledge the time and effort people make to show up — let them know it's appreciated!

- Introduce yourself, your organization, the Town Hall, and why you are holding the event — with a few brief comments reminding attendees of the importance of voter engagement. If the group is small enough, you might go around the room and invite each person to say their name, pronouns, and what brings them to the event.
- If you notice any local elected officials, community leaders, or other key individuals in the room, introduce them and thank them for their attendance.
- In your opening remarks, briefly explain the format of the event so people know what to expect and how long they might be there.
- Make sure to state the following about your organization's nonpartisan 501(c)(3) status at the outset of your event - and put this on a poster or flyer at the check-in table:

[Your organization] is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization and does not support or endorse any candidates for public office. All partner organizations are participating in today's event in strict accordance with these 501(c)(3) rules and restrictions. All speakers are participating in their individual capacity, and their statements are not attributable to or endorsed by the host organizations. There will be no discussion of candidates or political parties by town hall speakers. We ask that attendees refrain from displays of support for or opposition to any candidates or political parties.

During the livestream: This is the key element of your event.

- Be prepared to address topics or questions as they arise, either in the moment or at the end of each segment of the event. Have an assigned note taker/scribe to jot down recurring themes, ideas for action, questions, and other important items on a flip chart or in notes.
- Have someone stationed at each GOTV activity/activation area so that participants can engage during the event.
- At the close of the livestream, encourage participants to engage with the GOTV activities/activations before leaving (register to vote, sign up for a newsletter, sign up for a phone bank, etc.).

Ask your attendees for feedback: This QR code leads to a short questionnaire for attendees:



After the Event

Follow up: Remember to reach out to all the watch party partners, attendees, and speakers to thank them for attending. This can come in the form of a simple email or letter that shares information about the voter education work your organization does, action items that you took out of the event, and invites the participants to any future events.

Report back: Don't forget to let us know how your watch party went by completing this short questionnaire. Your feedback will help highlight the incredible impact of this historic event! Please use the QR code to find and complete a short questionnaire:

