

# House party overview

## ***Defined***

- Intimate; 15-50 people
- In a private home
- Brief; 2 hours maximum. Includes a 10-15 minute presentation and (perhaps) an ask; see below
- Quick to organize; 4-6 weeks to plan and do
- Volunteer-driven

## ***Decision points***

1. Host or host committee
2. Venue (whose home?)
3. Fundraising goal; typically \$2,500 - \$10,000
4. “Hook” – What will attract the participants? A celebrity? Menu? Venue? A request from a friend?
5. Invitation list
  - 25-40% of invitees will attend *if you phone them* after sending the invitation
  - 50/50 model: Half the list from host, half from the organization
6. How to ask for the gift
  - Fixed price in advance
  - Ask at the event (most efficient for time spent)
  - Treat it as a “friend-raiser” and follow up individually with those who attend
7. Who asks?
  - The host
  - Someone introduced by the host

# 1. **KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL HOUSE PARTY**

## 1. **An Enthusiastic Host/Hostess Who has Made a Significant Gift**

- ✓ Willing to host the event in their own home (not a restaurant or theater or third party location);
- ✓ Willing to provide a mailing list of friends and acquaintances;
- ✓ Willing to make follow-up phonecalls to get people to the party;
- ✓ Willing to make a direct ask for gifts or alternatively, willing to make a strong statement of support for your group's work;
- ✓ Willing to write thank you notes;
- ✓ Not essential but it's nice if the host is willing to cover the costs of food and beverage.

Where might you find some of your best host prospects?

Also, consider having folks co-host events—this divides the work between two or more people and makes it more doable.

## 2. **Give Yourself Plenty of Time**

A successful house party requires planning, scripting, phonecalls and logistical arrangements. Give yourself at least 6 to 8 weeks to put together the necessary materials and identify your host. Also put together a timeline of when things need to get done.

## 3. **Set Specific Goals**

Set two goals for your house party in concert with your host/hostess: (a) dollars to be raised; (b) # of people to attend; (c) # of invites to be mailed; (d) # of additional hosts to be identified.

## 4. **The Event Should Last Roughly 2 Hours**

A good time to host events is right after the work day from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. before people have had a chance to go home. The formal presentation itself should last no more than 40 minutes. Get the formal part of the evening underway about 30 to 45 minutes after the start time.

## 5. **Be Sure to Invite 3 to 4 Times as Many People as You Want to Attend**

The rule of thumb is that if you want 20 people at your event you need to invite somewhere between 60 and 80 people.

6. **Make it Clear on your Invitation that the Event is a Fundraiser**

Include language on your invitation like “Donations gratefully accepted” or “Please bring your checkbooks” so that no one is surprised or offended by an “ask”.

7. **Make Follow-Up Phonecalls**

**This is crucial.** Many house parties have failed because invitees were not contacted by phone and asked to attend the party. It’s much harder to turn down an invitation from a friend on the phone than it is to simply send in a “No” RSVP. Make your calls a week after you’ve sent the invitations—approximately two weeks before the party. As with major donors you want to reach the person directly on the phone so it may take 2 or 3 tries before you do so. If you need to, write out a script for these phonecalls or list reasons why it’s important that the person attend the party – yes, you’ll need to do a little convincing here!

8. **Identify the Person Who Is Best Qualified to Make the Ask**

Generally speaking your host or hostess is the best person to make the ask because it is their friends and acquaintances who have come to the party. What you need to keep in mind is that it should be a peer who is making the “ask”. If the host isn’t willing to do so, then a Board member from your organization is a good candidate. Ideally, the “asker” should be someone who can speak passionately about your organization’s work and someone who has already made a significant investment in your group. If you need to, script out the “ask” and help coach the “asker”.

9. **Make a Direct and Compelling Ask**

Mention amounts and tell people what their gift will enable your organization to do. Avoid words like “support” and “help”. Be specific and direct and make eye contact with your audience as you speak. Be sure to let people know that you can accept different kinds of gifts.

10. **Give People Time to Contemplate Their Gift**

Immediately after the “ask”, give people 3 to 5 minutes to contemplate their gift and deposit envelopes in baskets around the room. One thing that can help spur people to give, is to arrange before the party for one person to stand up and publicly commit to making a donation that night. This donor might say something like: “When I came here tonight I was prepared to give \$100, but now that I’ve heard Michael and understand how important this project is, I’m going to write a check for \$250 and I urge all of you to do the same or more.”

11. **Thank People as They Leave**

Have someone stationed at the door to thank guests for coming to your party. Someone who didn't make a gift that night may turn out to be an individual who wants to make a stock donation the following week.

12. **Write Thank You Notes**

Write thank you notes for gifts the next day. Where necessary, make follow-up phonecalls to individuals who needed more time to contemplate their gift or who wanted questions answered.

**Other Little Pointers From My Own Experience**

1. Make sure to collect names at the door. Ask people to sign in. This will enable you to do follow-up after the event.
2. Don't put a gift basket by the front door. Certainly, this may encourage someone to make a gift but it won't be a stretch gift nor will it be one that's informed by your organization's compelling presentation.
3. Make it fun for people. Provide lots of good finger foods. Unless you are MADD or AA or the host is sensitive about serving alcohol, make it available to guests. Include some entertainment if you can (music). Remember that there has to be some incentive for invitees to come to the party.
4. Offer challenges where possible. Perhaps you can offer a Board challenge or a Host challenge. Create a thermometer like the United Way and continue to update it as the evening progresses—towards your fundraising goal. This also gives you an opportunity to convince people to make a gift—ie., "we've only got \$250 more to raise before we reach our goal tonight".
5. Depending on the size of the crowd have a minimum of 2 and perhaps as many as 4 or 5 people representing your organization at the event. Make sure to identify yourselves by wearing specially marked nametags.
6. Have information available about how to make gifts of stock or pledges over time.

## NIGHT OF THE PARTY OUTLINE

1. **HOST WELCOMES GUESTS AND INTRODUCES AND CREDENTIALS**  
**SPEAKERS:** Audience must know speaker's connection with the campaign, job title and responsibilities so that they are perceived as a credible and authoritative voice for the campaign.
2. **SPEAKER THANKS HOST** for having the party and thanks everyone for coming.
3. **CIRCULATE SIGN IN SHEET** (so we know names and addresses of those who attended the party) and mention that campaign materials are available for folks to take with them.
4. **PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE PARTY AND AGENDA:** Tonight I will tell you about our goals, conduct a slideshow presentation of the lands we want to protect, give you a chance to ask questions, and ask for your help.
5. **CONDUCT FORMAL PRESENTATION** which should last no longer than 30 minutes.
6. **QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD** (5 to 10 minutes).
7. **THE CHALLENGE (this is a sample from NWEA's Loomis Forest Fund Campaign):**
  - (a) As you can see, we have an ambitious goal in front of us, with precious forests on the chopping block this year that we must protect now.
  - (b) To be successful, we will need your help in three ways:
    - Give generously to this campaign;
    - Host a house party so we can continue to expand our effort;
    - Write a letter to one of our key congressional allies in support of the Partnership campaign.
  - (c) Tonight, our goal is to raise enough money to protect 5 (or whatever you think appropriate given the audience and size of the party) acre—that's \$2000.
  - (d) Moreover, we have a great opportunity to double your investment with a challenge grant from the Paul Allen Forest Protection Foundation. This means your dollars will go twice the distance tonight.
  - (e) In order to meet tonight's goal, we need all of you to stretch beyond what you thought you'd contribute. Just a reminder: we need to raise \$25 million in private money to save these lands. 10% of that is going to come from grassroots gifts—including parties like these. That's \$2.5 million. That's a lot of money and to get there, we need you consider making these largest conservation gift you've ever made.

If you are able to make a gift of 2 or 3 acres—a gift of \$800 to \$1200—then please do so now.

If you can protect 1 acre at \$400, that would be extraordinary.

If a \$100 gift is what you had in mind, please write a check to protect half an acre at \$200.

If you came here tonight thinking you'd give \$50, please consider giving \$100.

8. **HOST SUPPORTS THIS PITCH WITH A PERSONAL TESTIMONIAL, ANNOUNCEMENT OF HIS/HER CONTRIBUTION AND A STATEMENT ENCOURAGING HIS/HER FRIENDS TO HELP REACH THE STATED GOAL.** (1 to 2 minutes).

Now I'm going to give you a couple of minutes right now to contemplate your gift. I want you to know that you have some giving options to consider:

- (i) You can write a check tonight;
- (ii) You can give via credit card – VISA or MASTERCARD;
- (iii) You can make a pledge over two years;
- (iv) You can make a gift of appreciated stock.

I'm also going to distribute pledge forms along with pens and envelopes. Please deposit your gift in the baskets (point to where they are). I'd ask you to remain seated for just a few more minutes so I can tell you about two additional ways that you can help us. Then the formal part of this evening's program will end although I'll certainly be available to answer any questions that you might have.

9. **NOW STOP TALKING: It's important to give people time to consider the amount of their gift** (3 to 5 minutes). **THEN THANK PEOPLE FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS – LET THEM KNOW HOW MUCH YOU APPRECIATE THEIR GIFT.**
10. **THE CLOSE:** You've been a wonderful group of people to meet with and I want to thank our host for getting us all together. We've accomplished a lot here tonight thanks to your generous support. Again, thank you for coming. Now, please, enjoy the fine food, beverages and company. **HOST CAN SAY SOMETHING HERE IF HE OR SHE LIKES.**

## **SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR HOUSE PARTY ASK**

Thank you Michael for that thoughtful and compelling presentation. As you can all see, Solar Electric Light Fund has a number of ambitious goals for 2004—fostering scientific research and protecting endangered species in Brazil; improving health care clinics in the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific; providing individual solar home systems for a remote village in war-torn Sri Lanka and more. To be successful the Solar Electric Light Fund needs you to give generously to these campaigns. Tonight, our goal is to raise \$2,500—enough money, for instance, to properly light health clinics in the Solomon Islands for three months. Moreover, you have a great opportunity to double your investment because I've decided to make a challenge gift of \$2,500. This means your dollars will go twice the distance tonight.

In order to meet tonight's goal, I need all of you to stretch beyond what you thought you'd contribute. If you came here tonight thinking that you would make a gift of \$50, I'd like you to consider doubling your investment with a \$100 donation. If \$100 is what you had in mind, please consider stretching your gift to \$250. If you are in a position to make a gift of \$250 or more, please do so. All gifts this evening will be enormously appreciated. Please note that the Solar Electric Light Fund accepts both cash and credit card gifts. You can also pledge your gift over time or make a gift of appreciated stock. Please speak to either Michael or myself directly if you wish to take advantage of these latter two options.

I want us all to take a few minutes right now to contemplate our gifts. The baskets that are presently circulating contain both envelopes for you to enclose your gift and gift response forms. I'd ask that you remain seated for just a few more minutes so that I can tell you about two additional ways that you can help us.

### **Additional Ways to Help**

Very quickly, there are two additional ways that you can help. If you know others who would be interested in supporting SELF's work, please provide us with those names by filling out the Friends and Family forms available on the table by the front door. Also, if you'd be willing to host a house party just like this one—and believe me it wasn't that hard—please speak to Michael. SELF is always looking for host recruits.