

WORDS CAN WORK®

Knowing the issues, talking with kids.

A Step-By-Step Guide to Organizing a Community Forum Featuring Blake Works DVDs and *Words Can Work* Booklets.

Many communities have held successful Community Forums featuring *Words Can Work* DVDs and booklets. Blake Works has co-hosted these events, each one was attended by more than 300 policymakers, advocates, healthcare providers, parents, educators, counselors, and corporate work/life and EAP directors.

We have developed a successful formula. Our events last two to three hours. We have found that for working professionals, mornings work best. Suggested schedule:

9:00-9:30 sign in, coffee, and networking
9:30-10:00 brief remarks from invited speakers
10:00-10:25 watch the DVD
10:30-noon moderator and expert panel lead discussion with attendees.

As attendees sign in, offer them a complimentary package including the DVD and *Words Can Work* booklets featured in the event. They are urged to replicate the Community Forum in their city or town, and these materials are essential in doing so. You can host a well-attended Community Forum on any topic addressed in our DVDs by following this step-by-step guide: ***(We recommend beginning to plan four months ahead of your scheduled event. A successful forum can be planned in a shorter period of time if necessary. Simply follow the same steps.)***

Four months before the Community Forum

- Invite organizations to co-host the event. May include City or State Departments of Public Health or Mental Health; local hospitals; community youth organizations; State Senators and Representatives.
- Develop a budget. Costs include the DVD, *Words Can Work* booklets, refreshments, and may include fee for event location, and audio/visual equipment.
- Identify sponsors. Potential sponsors may include state agencies, hospitals, insurance companies, corporations, foundations, HMOs, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and City Departments of Health. (Our sponsors included the Department of Public Health, Department of Mental Health, Mass General Hospital, and a local HMO.)
- Pick a time and place for the Community Forum. Take into account: a central location that will draw attendees; availability of parking or public transportation; availability of in-house audio/visual equipment (to save rental fees).
- Form a planning committee. May include representatives of the Department of Health; agencies or community organizations with a vested interest in the issue being addressed; parenting organizations, legislative aides, school personnel, college communities, including college health services, and representatives of the co-hosting organizations.

Three months before the Community Forum

- Hold the first meeting of the co-hosts and planning committee.
- List potential speakers and panel members. Include representatives of co-hosts, a health care professional, and representatives of local mental health, substance abuse or youth serving organizations, depending on the topic addressed by your Community Forum. We also recommend inviting a young adult affected by the issue (substance abuse; depression, etc.) to speak.
- Assign tasks: securing the event space; checking out availability of audiovisual equipment; contacting speakers/panel members. Identify an organization that will send e-invites and receive RSVPs. (This person must also be prepared to answer questions about the event, including directions and parking.)
- Decide whom to invite. Include members of organizations with a vested interest in the issue being addressed, i.e., if the featured DVD is *Depression: True Stories*, include representatives of local mental health organizations. Also include public health officials, educators, guidance counselors, policymakers, health care professionals, advocates, peer leaders, college communities, including college health services, representatives of communities

of faith, and corporate Employee Assistance Providers. (Download a free invitation template at <http://www.wordscanwork.com/products/seminars.html>.)

- Select Community Forum moderator/facilitator who has public speaking experience and knowledge of the issues being addressed. (Blake Works founder and president Jeanne Blake moderated the Community Forums co-hosted by Blake Works and is available to moderate your Community Forum. For more information visit <http://www.wordscanwork.com/products/seminars.html>)
- Identify volunteers to set up, welcome and sign in attendees, hand out complimentary packages of materials, and clean up after the event.
- Schedule another planning meeting.

Six weeks before the Community Forum

- Finalize the agenda: speakers and panel members. (Download a free agenda template at <http://www.wordscanwork.com/products/seminars.html>.)
- Create and send e-invites. Co-hosts e-mail e-invite to their membership and contacts. (Download a free e-vite template at <http://www.wordscanwork.com/products/seminars.html>.)
- Write a press release and event program. We suggest including a list of local resources and Websites. (Download free template at <http://www.wordscanwork.com/products/seminars.html>.)
- Reserve audio/visual equipment: large screen TV or projector, microphones for speakers and panel members, and microphones for audience members asking questions of the panel
- Order DVD and *Words Can Work* booklets from Blake Works and determine who is responsible for delivery of DVDs *Words Can Work* booklets to the Community Forum location.
- Plan refreshments.

One week before the Community Forum

- Confirm speakers, refreshments, audio/visual equipment, and set-up/clean-up volunteers.
- Create sign-in sheets and a list of names for reserved seating (if any).
- Send the press release and follow up with calls to local media.
- Copy any handouts, including programs. (Print extras. People who didn't pre-register may attend.)

Day of Community Forum

- Ensure there is sufficient seating for attendees and place seat holders on reserved seats.
- Set up a registration table with sign-in sheets. As attendees arrive, check them in and hand each a package including the DVD and *Words Can Work* booklet. (We limit one per organization.)
- Set up the refreshment table.
- Check all AV equipment and queue up the DVD.

Day after the Community Forum

- E-mail the evaluation form to attendees. (Download a free template at <http://www.wordscanwork.com/products/seminars.html>.)

**If you have questions about planning a Community Forum in your community, we can help.
Call Blake Works at 978.282.1663 or e-mail info@wordscanwork.com.**