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ABSTRACT

More than 200 years after its founding, the U.S. government continues to thrive on argument, dispute, and debate. For citizens to be fully engaged in the political process, they must continue to participate in the tradition of public discourse exemplified by the ratification debate of 1787-88. College-Community Forums are designed to further discussion of the constitutional issues that shape the nation's government. The Forums are based on traditional town meetings where citizens voice their opinions on matters of local concern. This handbook was written as part of a Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution program to fund a limited number of Forums. It is intended to serve as a guide for organizers of Commission-funded programs and as a valuable resource for organizers of other public forums on the Constitution. The guide discusses the several aspects of organizing a Forum: purpose, format, meeting space, selecting panelists, audience, media coverage, finances and fundraising, topics and content, and evaluation. Three appendices also are included: a sample letter to prospective panelists, a sample text for advertisement, and a sample press release. (DB)

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# COLLEGE-COMMUNITY FORUMS



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## PROGRAM HANDBOOK



Commission on the Bicentennial  
of the United States Constitution  
808 Seventeenth Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) USA-1787

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## INTRODUCTION

*Two hundred years ago, the American people became the first to establish government by acts of popular consent. That consent was the product of an extraordinary national dialogue on the elementary principles of government which began to surface as early as 1765. After 1781, the flaws of the government under The Articles of Confederation became evident, and step by step after the Mount Vernon and Annapolis Conventions the need for a strong central government became clear. In the course of the struggle to ratify the Constitution, Americans debated the merits of the new system of government framed in 1787.*

*Our government today continues to thrive on argument, dispute and debate. For citizens to be fully engaged in the political process, they must continue to participate in the American tradition of public discourse exemplified by the ratification debates of 1787-88. If the adoption of the Constitution was worthy of a solemn national debate, its adaptation to conditions -- past, present and future -- seems equally deserving.*

*College-Community Forums are designed to further discussion of the constitutional issues that shape our nation's government. The Forums will promote a deeper and more widely shared understanding of the Constitution among Americans and offer citizens the opportunity to debate contemporary constitutional issues.*

*The Forums are based on traditional town meetings where citizens voice their opinions on matters of local concern. Not only will expert moderators and panelists contribute to the content of the programs, but in addition audience members will be encouraged to participate actively by asking questions and offering their own opinions. We believe that this type of "grassroots" discussion of the Constitution will contribute to a long-lasting public awareness of the principles of American government.*

*We hope this handbook will help you attain these goals. This handbook was written as part of the Commission's program to fund a limited number of Forums. We hope that it will serve both as a guide for organizers of these Commission-funded Forums and as a valuable resource for organizers of other public forums on the Constitution.*

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## THE COMMISSION ON THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION AND THE CONTINUING CELEBRATION

The Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution was established by the U.S. Congress to oversee the five-year celebration (1987-1991) of the nation's founding document. Twenty-three prominent Americans sit on the Commission, chaired by Warren E. Burger, Chief Justice of the United States from 1969 to 1986. Its major objective is to encourage Bicentennial activities by organizations and individuals in every state, to heighten awareness of -- and deepen appreciation for -- our Constitution and the rights and freedoms it guarantees and thus to give ourselves a history and civics lesson on the founding of our nation.

To this end, the Commission is working with regional, federal, private sector, educational, international, state and local groups in the creation of Bicentennial programs ranging from map and essay contests to College-Community Forums.

Although the Bicentennial of the framing of the Constitution is past, the celebration of the document continues. From 1988 through 1991, Americans will celebrate the legacy of ratification and the formation of the federal government. Each year the Commission's activities will have a different theme:

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1988-89       | <i>Articles I and II</i>                               |
| Academic Year | <i>The Legislative Branch and the Executive Branch</i> |
| 1989-90       | <i>Articles II and III</i>                             |
|               | <i>The Executive Branch and the Judiciary</i>          |
| 1990-91       | <i>Article III and The Bill of Rights</i>              |
|               | <i>and Subsequent Amendments</i>                       |

The years 1787-1791 were a creative, seminal period in American history and still provide abundant material for reflection today. The debates between Federalists and Anti-Federalists in those years still reverberate through American politics. For the next four years we have an opportunity to refresh our acquaintance with the fundamental issues of American politics, guided by the words and deeds of the founding generation.

# COLLEGE-COMMUNITY BICENTENNIAL FORUMS

*"Wherever public spirit prevails, liberty is secure." - Noah Webster*

## Purpose

Throughout the celebration of the bicentennial anniversary of the Constitution, programs have encouraged wider public knowledge of the Constitution and its enduring legacy. College-Community Forums share this goal and offer an opportunity for the public at large to participate directly in discussion and debate on the Constitution.

These Forums offer an opportunity for colleges and universities to initiate Bicentennial programs which include the surrounding community. Though the Forums would most often be coordinated by faculty members or administrators from colleges, they would retain their community focus by joining colleges with other civic institutions, such as libraries and private associations, to organize the events, and by including non-academic authorities from the community as panelists.

It is hoped the Forums will encourage further cooperation between "town" and "gown." Furthermore, in creating a forum for the exchange of ideas on the fundamental questions of American government in an atmosphere familiar to the participants, the Commission hopes to stimulate an on-going discussion of the principles of the Constitution and the structure of government.

## Format

Because of the community focus of the program, decisions on the format of the College-Community Forums should be made by the local organizers of the events. They know the type of program that will appeal to the local audience. Certain general principles, however, seem to apply to the majority of situations.

The prototype for the College-Community Forum is the public meeting in which a small panel leads a discussion. Under this format, each panel should consist of approximately four or five speakers including a moderator. Each panelist can present a brief opening statement followed by questions from the moderator or fellow panelists. Subsequently, audience members should be provided with the opportunity to ask questions and offer their own positions.

**Curriculum Materials.** Ideally, the audience and the panelists will have read the background materials distributed prior to the meeting. This will ensure that both the panelists and the audience possess some common background on the topic and helps define the scope of a particular session.

Materials could include a collection of articles or selections from books about the topic to be discussed. A special effort should be made to integrate original sources into the curriculum. It is also recommended that a variety of views be presented in source materials; this will help contribute to lively and informed debate.

Curricular materials could be supplemented by a "mini-lecture" in which a panelist provides the background information necessary to understand the subsequent discussion and participate in the debate. The Forum could also center on a film that addresses a Constitutional issue. The time required to show a film or to hear a lecture, however, may foreclose the panel discussion or the open dialogue.

**Audience Participation.** The Forums could feature small-group discussions to enhance the opportunity for audience members to participate. At a minimum, audience members should have the opportunity to ask questions of the panelists and offer brief comments. You may find it helpful to have an assistant roving the audience with a microphone or a stationary microphone in a central location to amplify the voices of participating audience members. Alternatively, the presider should repeat questions raised by the audience.

Decisions on audience participation should also be considered in light of the size of the audience. Keep in mind, for example, that in a large meeting of 200 people, it may be impractical to break into groups of ten each without consuming an unreasonable amount of time.

### Meeting Space

To maintain the focus of these programs on the community, suitable sites may include libraries, churches, schools, courthouses and other public buildings as well as the college campus. All sites should be free of barriers to the handicapped.

The main purpose of the College-Community Forums is to encourage public attendance and participation. We encourage organizers to choose meeting places that will be most accessible and convenient for the public.

### Selecting Panelists

One of the most crucial aspects of running a successful College-Community Forum is selecting a group of qualified panelists who will spark lively audience participation. Likely candidates include local public figures and community leaders who can offer interesting and informed opinions on the Constitution. Many organizations keep lists of potential speakers; the Commission's Speakers Bureau maintains a list of about 300 persons qualified to discuss the Constitution and its history.

As with the curriculum materials, organizers should strive for political and philosophical balance among the panelists with a variety of disciplines represented.

## Audience

To generate an audience, we have found the best method is to contact civic organizations with large local memberships who regularly take an interest in community affairs. These would include civic, professional, service, fraternal, ethnic and other groups.

High school civics classes and corporate staff development programs might also be included among your invitees. Other groups might be termed "issue-specific," having a special concern for a particular topic.

By working through these organizations, the distribution of materials will be much easier. Ideally, an individual in each group would be identified as a group contact, who would then be responsible for publicity within that group. Organizers of the Forums can provide posters and information sheets to the group contacts, who can then distribute them.

Once the publicity for the event is launched, individuals interested in attending the Forums should respond to their group contact who will then distribute the curricular materials. With this system, organizers will be able to disseminate materials easily and keep track of the size of the audience.

Background information may be offered at the Forum itself, rather than being distributed beforehand. The system need not be rigid, though it would be wise to request a response to keep track of the audience size.

If organizers wish to advertise the Forums to the wider community, the most cost-effective method would be through community calendars, public service announcements, and guest appearances on local television and radio talk shows. Newspapers commonly list community events. By attempting to generate an audience through advertisement of the event to the community at large, however, the organizers of the Forum themselves would bear the brunt of distributing materials.

## Media Coverage

To extend the impact of the Forums beyond just the participants, organizers should explore possible broadcast coverage. With media coverage of the event, more people will be reminded of the importance of continuing discussion on the Constitution.

Opportunities for full-length, live or tape-delayed coverage are numerous. Once a panel of distinguished citizens is announced, the attractiveness of a broadcast package will increase. Cable television, public television, and talk- and news-oriented radio stations might offer extended coverage. Cable television often includes public affairs channels which are continually in search of programming. These media outlets should be contacted early in the planning process.

To obtain news coverage of the event, Forum leaders should issue a press release to local newspapers and television and radio stations. A sample press release is included in the Appendix. A phone call following up the press release may also be helpful in gaining attention for your program.



If your event will be held in a large media market, you may wish to focus your efforts on the regional sections of metropolitan newspapers which feature news from outlying communities.

**Press Coordinator.** At the event itself, a press coordinator would be useful in assisting the media representatives in attendance. Distribution of a folder of press materials which could include a press release, biographical information on the panelists and background materials on the topic to be discussed would be helpful for those covering the event. The media coordinator could also arrange interviews with the members of the panel before or after the event.

**Newsletters.** Community group newsletters can be very effective means of reaching particular audiences with your announcements.

Videotaping or tape recording of the proceedings of the Forum should be considered. Other groups, such as school and continuing education classes, may wish to use the tape of the Forum as a learning tool.

### **Finances and Fundraising**

Raising funds may be the least enjoyable but most necessary part of a successful program. We have tried, in what follows, to suggest a few basic rules for successful fundraising.

**Commission Funding.** Beginning in the Fall of 1988 the Commission is undertaking a pilot program to provide a limited number of colleges and universities with the opportunity to organize Forums with limited Commission funding. For information about financial assistance from the Commission, please write:

*Education Division  
Commission on the Bicentennial  
of the United States Constitution  
808 17th Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006*

**Budget.** The first task for the fundraising coordinator is to determine the financial needs of the project by writing up a project budget. Here are some of the items that might be included in a budget: curriculum materials; panelist expenses; equipment rental; hospitality; promotional expenses; general office expenses; miscellaneous.

**Proposal.** Once your total need is determined, you can begin to develop a proposal to submit to your local funding prospects. Your proposal should be as specific as possible, including the following sections:

I. Statement of Need: Why is this project needed? What problem is it addressing? What are the consequences of failing to address the problem? Why should this problem be addressed before others?

**II. Project Summary:** This is a short description of your program. Briefly state also the goals and objectives of the program in clear terms. Tell your potential donors why you think this program is distinctive.

**III. Organization and Administration:** Here you should more specifically state how you propose to run your project, keeping in mind your goals and objectives. How will you publicize your event? Where will it be held? Who will participate? How will curricular materials be distributed? How will the finances of the project be handled? A task schedule listing all the jobs that must be completed would be helpful. You should outline your organizational structure stating job responsibilities of each person involved in the project. What other groups will be involved in organizing and sponsoring the program? How will they be integrated into the organization?

**IV. Sponsor Qualification:** What are the organizers' qualifications? What special abilities do the organizers of the Forum possess that indicate their capacity to run a program of this type?

**V. Evaluation:** How will you measure the success of your program? You might include a list of questions which you will answer once your project is concluded.

**VI. Budget:** You should include a copy of the budget you have prepared. Include any narrative necessary to explain individual items of your budget.

**VII. Appendices:** These would include any supporting materials such as resumes of key personnel and letters of support from cooperating organizations and universities.

**Funding Sources.** Your next step in obtaining the funding necessary is developing a list of public and private contributors who would be interested in a project of this type. You should keep in mind the expressed project interests of the prospective donors as you develop your list. Some potential sources are:

1) **Individuals:** Are there civic-minded persons in your community who would be willing to contribute?

2) **Businesses:** Many companies have corporate contribution departments who handle requests of this type. You might also be able to interest a smaller business that relies on the patronage of the community to fund the program or parts of it.

3) **Foundations:** Many charitable foundations offer grants for civic education projects. The problem, however, is that most are national in scope and offer little funding to local groups. Your best bet would be to identify local foundations that maintain a special interest in local and regional programs.

4) **Community Organizations:** Many community groups have limited resources available for support of local programs. These might include fraternal organizations, veterans' groups, etc.

5) **State and Local Humanities Councils:** Often these organizations are interested in funding events that bring the humanities to the public. Check with the councils in your area for specific requirements and deadlines.

6) Bar Associations and Chambers of Commerce may be of help in locating possible funding sources.

There are many publications on the billion-dollar fundraising "industry." Some of the best are produced by the Foundation Center. These include The Foundation Directory, National Data Book, and The Foundation Center Source Book Profiles. Many directories listing state and regional foundations are also available.

Once your list of potential donors is composed, you should send to each a copy of your proposal along with a cover letter. The cover letter should stress the importance of the project in meeting a clear community need.

**Helpful Hints.** Here are some general guidelines to remember when trying to raise funds:

*\* Do not try to raise money as the first task in organizing the project. Wait until you can prepare a proposal with adequate detail. If you include the names of your panelists, for example, you will enhance the credibility of your program.*

*\* In writing the proposal, pay attention to style and precision as well as content. Avoid professional jargon.*

*\* When planning your event, be sure to allow sufficient time for donors to respond to your queries. The application process for some foundations can last as long as six months.*

*\* Once you receive your funding, make sure you abide by the terms of your grant.*

*\* If donors desire, you should note their contribution in materials prepared for the program.*

## Topics and Content

A crucial aspect of organizing a College-Community Forum is selecting a topic that will interest your audience. You will need to narrow the Forum topic to a theme that can be adequately addressed and discussed in a period of two or two-and-a-half hours. When selecting the topic, keep in mind the availability of informed speakers on the proposed subject in your community, the amount of interest in that topic in your community and the potential for effective communication about that topic. The topic should not require too much technical knowledge.

Before selecting the topic, you might wish to consult with community and organization leaders, especially those who may be involved in the Forum as panelists, to determine the type of subjects in which they might be interested. By contacting prospective panelists before setting the topic, you will be able to select a theme that the panelists feel comfortable addressing.

## Evaluation

The importance of this final phase of your program is often overlooked. If you evaluate your program upon its conclusion, you can save this information for other programs of this type that your institution may organize in the future. By making your evaluation available to the Commission, we can pass this information on to other College-Community Forum organizers so the same mistakes are not repeated. Particularly successful features can serve as models.

We recommend that, as you prepare your program proposal, you design a formal evaluation process which would include, but not be limited to, a questionnaire for your audience and panel of experts as well as a written evaluation by the Forum organizer. You should provide Forum participants with the opportunity to complete the questionnaire at the Forum or mail it to the organizer at a later date. The written organizer evaluation should answer at the very least the following questions:

- \*How many people attended?*
- \*Of the people who attended, how many participated in the discussion?*
- \*How much press coverage did the Forum receive?*
- \*What aspects of the Forum could have been better organized?*
- \*How successful were your fundraising efforts? What were your most successful approaches?*
- \*How effective were you in disseminating your curricular materials?*
- \*How successful was your effort in obtaining the support, cooperation and participation of other colleges and universities?*
- \*Were the panelists well-informed on the issues?*
- \*How close were your budget estimates to actual expenditures?*

The overall effectiveness of your program should not be weighed solely in terms of one question or another. Your final appraisal should encompass all aspects of your program. Extensive press coverage and a large audience do not necessarily indicate a strong program. All factors should be included in the final analysis of the value of your Forum.

## APPENDICES

A. Sample Letter to Prospective Panelists

B. Sample Text for Advertisement

C. Sample Press Release

## APPENDIX A

### Sample Letter to Prospective Panelists

June 24, 1988

Ms. Jane Doe  
999 Maple Street  
College Town, USA

Dear Ms. Doe:

This October, Sample State University in consortium with a number of local colleges will sponsor a significant event which will further public understanding of our nation's founding document. As you know, only through active citizenship and thorough knowledge of the Constitution will the principles of our founding document be preserved. As Noah Webster wrote, "Wherever public spirit prevails, liberty is secure."

Our event, called a College-Community Bicentennial Forum, will resemble the traditional town meeting where local citizens gather to discuss the concerns of the day. The event is endorsed by the national Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution. In our Forum, prominent local citizens will lead and members of the community will take part in a discussion on the Constitution. The theme of our event will be "The Rights of the Accused in the Constitutional Order."

Because of your proven interest in community affairs and your very pertinent background for speaking on this topic, I would like to invite you to serve as a panelist for the Forum. As a panelist, you would be responsible for presenting a two-minute summation of your views on the topic, participating in the panel discussion and responding to questions from the audience. We will also provide you with adequate background materials, though we doubt you will need them.

I hope you are interested in participating in such a worthy project whose effects will surely persist beyond the conclusion of the Forum. If you are willing to participate, please call me at your convenience. Feel free also to call with any questions.

Sincerely yours,

Prof. John Q. Public  
Director,  
College-Community Bicentennial Forum

## APPENDIX B

### Sample Text for College-Community Forum Advertisement

Sample State University  
in consortium with Sample Community College  
and Sample College of the Liberal Arts  
present a College-Community Bicentennial Forum  
on

#### **"THE RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER"**

November 1, 1991 8:00 P.M.  
College Town Public Library

The Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution includes many provisions defining the rights of the accused. The Supreme Court in recent years has considered many cases that have required the court to interpret the stipulations of Amendments IV through VIII. Questions about the rights of the accused persist. At this College-Community Bicentennial Forum, you will have the opportunity to ask a panel of experts: Are the criminally-accused overly protected by the courts? Or is the American legal system biased in the opposite direction?

A panel of local experts, including the following, will lead the discussion:

*Ms. Jane Doe, Civic Activist*  
*Mr. Roy Johnson, Former County Prosecutor*  
*Dr. Franklin Jones, Criminologist and Author*  
*Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, Mayor of College Town*  
*Mr. Walter Williams, Esq., Attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union*

*Moderator: Prof. John Q. Public, Sample State University,  
Department of Political Science*

Audience members, to assure a provocative discussion, are asked to review a small packet of readings on the rights of the accused, including newspaper editorials, several Supreme Court decisions, and a short periodical article. To register for the Forum and receive your materials packet, please call (999) 999-9999.

College-Community Bicentennial Forums seek to deepen public understanding of the Constitution. The sponsoring institutions hope the program will spark an on-going discussion of constitutional issues in the College Town community.

The Forums are modeled after the traditional American town meeting where local citizens gathered to discuss the political issues of the day. This Forum is endorsed by the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution.

## APPENDIX C

### Sample Press Release for the College-Community Bicentennial Forum

Sample State University  
Administration Hall  
1000 Faculty Road  
College Town, USA

For Immediate Release  
October 1, 1991

Contact:  
Prof. John Q. Public (999) 999-9999

#### College and Community to Join in Discussion of Constitution

Sample State University, in consortium with Sample Community College and Sample College of the Liberal Arts, will sponsor a College-Community Bicentennial Forum on "The Rights of the Accused in the Constitutional Order" as part of the ongoing celebration of the Constitution's bicentennial anniversary. The Forum will take place at the College Town Public Library at 8:00 p.m. on November 1, 1991.

The Forum will be fashioned after the traditional American town meeting where citizens gathered to debate political issues. This "town meeting on the Constitution" will feature a panel of prominent local citizens who are experts on the rights of the accused. The panel will consist of

Ms. Jane Doe, Civic Activist  
Mr. Roy Johnson, Former County Prosecutor  
Dr. Franklin Jones, Criminologist and Author  
Mrs. Elizabeth Smith, Mayor of College Town  
Mr. Walter Williams, Esq., Attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union

Moderator: Prof. John Q. Public, Sample State University  
Department of Political Science

While the panel will lead the discussion, the audience will have extensive opportunities for participation in the Forum. Forum organizer John Q. Public, a political scientist at Sample State University, explains: "The purpose of the program is to stimulate 'grassroots' discussion of constitutional principles, so the wide-ranging participation of the public is essential to the success of the program."

The College-Community Bicentennial Forum is funded by a grant from the Hometown Corporation.