

# Local Civic Engagement Team Organizing Toolkit



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# ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

## HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

When everyday people feel they have a stake in their community, they are more likely to participate in its public life, involve others and vote. Jersey Civic Engage, and its core program the NJ Alliance for Civic Engagement (NJACE), are about helping to make that happen.

The New Jersey Department of State, as part of its Jersey Civic Engage/NJACE effort, created this Toolkit. Community members, students, organizers, and leaders who want to support the work of those initiatives and who are interested in forming or participating in a Local Civic Engagement Team (LCET) will find this toolkit helpful. It includes information that explains what a LCET is, its purpose and structure, how to organize it and then start to create civic engagement related activities. It provides ideas and ways to accomplish this important work.

For additional information about Jersey Civic Engage and NJACE please go to our website at: [JerseyCivicEngage.NJ.Gov](http://JerseyCivicEngage.NJ.Gov).

# BUILDING A LOCAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAM

## **What is a Local Civic Engagement Team?**

Local Civic Engagement Teams (LCETs) are the backbone of the NJ Alliance for Civic Engagement collaborative coalition and its outreach efforts.

By establishing these non-partisan grassroots teams, we will continue to build on the statewide coalition we began during the 2020 Census and focus specifically on promoting civic competency through regular events and activities in our communities. In particular, we want to involve our new and future voters so that they can form the regular habit of civic participation and voting.

LCETs serve as organizing action teams and are resource and activity hubs for civic and voter engagement. It is from these teams that the trusted voices, so critical to the success of our efforts, will emerge.

## **Who Can Be Part of Local Civic Engagement Teams?**

LCETs are volunteer based and are comprised of a cross-section of participants including, but not limited to, everyday community members, youth and students, community organizations, and our faith, education, social service, healthcare, business, labor, and government communities. Its goals are to educate, empower and motivate community members to participate in the public life of their communities.

## **Types of Local Civic Engagement Teams**

We all belong to some sort of community. How a community is defined can vary. Some of these communities are our neighborhoods or the towns where we live, but geography isn't the only way to find belonging. Some of us find community in shared heritage or shared faith. We may find it among the families whose children attend the same schools. We may find it in a community social group or the college or high school we attend. Many of us, especially after the last two years, find belonging in virtual spaces.

By design, LCETs should reflect the community to which they belong. Importantly, they should include everyday people willing to commit to volunteer to be part of the team's efforts. Their makeup may be different depending on the needs and requirements of the group. What should remain consistent are the organizing tactics outlined in this toolkit. Likewise, messaging should express the voice of the community it is part of but comport with the base goals of NJACE.

## **Local Civic Engagement Teams Are Organizing Action Teams**

LCETs create awareness and organize civic engagement related activities in our communities across the state. The keys to successful implementation are that they be respectful, empowering and inclusive, and that value set is part of their community message.

Local teams are the most effective and productive way to organize. When community members are informed, as well as empowered to inform others, they are more likely to become involved in the public lives of their communities and consequently vote.

NJACE teams provide everyday New Jerseyans an opportunity to participate in active and effective ways in the public lives of their communities. Participants can take ownership over the implementation of their team's action plan, and play a key role in developing additional partners to educate and motivate residents to get involved.

## **WHY WE NEED TO FORM LOCAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAMS**

As the backbone of NJACE's outreach effort, LCETs work to increase civic and voter participation by everyday New Jerseyans across and among our diverse communities.

They create and empower the trusted voices that are best able to mobilize community resources efficiently and persuade community members about the importance of civic and voter engagement.

They help make voting a sustainable community activity and norm and work to activate communities to vote as a community.

They include community influencers who can create localized messaging that resonates with other members of the community.

## WHAT DO LOCAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAMS DO?

They utilize local knowledge, influence, and resources to educate their community and to promote and grow civic and voter engagement through locally based outreach efforts.

They provide a vehicle for coordinating and nurturing cooperative, collaborative efforts within their communities and with other communities and organizations.

They serve as community action organizing teams that provide resources and activities related to civic and voter engagement.

They develop action plans specific to their own community.

They will share resources and activities with others on the Jersey Civic Engage website.

## WHEN SHOULD LOCAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TEAMS FORM?

RIGHT NOW! This is a great time to start to organize your team and civic engagement awareness activities.

## WHY ORGANIZE AS TEAMS?

### Organize As a Team: BECAUSE IT WORKS!

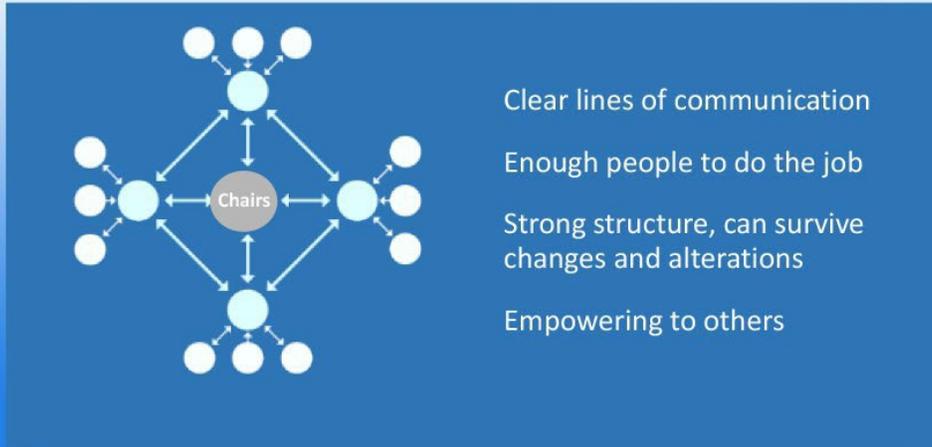
Why?	Benefits
<b>Empowering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteers feel part of something bigger</li><li>• Volunteers take on more responsibility</li><li>• Volunteers can own a specific piece</li></ul>
<b>More Productive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Team members work more than <u>twice</u> as many hours as regular volunteers</li><li>• Teams produce more work than individuals</li></ul>
<b>Built to Last</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enough people to do what needs to be done</li><li>• Grows with additional volunteers</li><li>• <u>Strong volunteer leadership structure</u></li></ul>



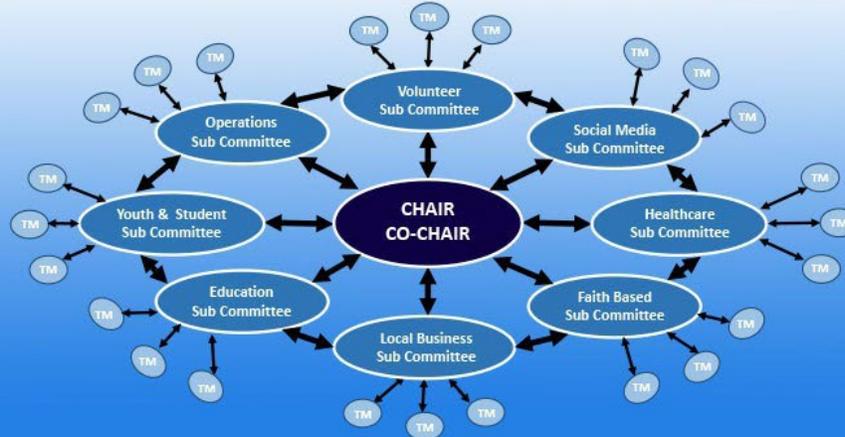
Build LCETs to be sustainable, to last. Community based teams should be volunteer led, with motivated everyday people integral to each team. Volunteers thrive on teams. We know that team based volunteers are more invested, and are typically twice as productive as individual volunteers.

## WHAT OUR TEAMS LOOK LIKE

### What our teams will look like



### Local Civic Engagement Team Example



Teams can cover a specific geographic area, like a county, a town, or a neighborhood. However, community can mean different things to different groups. Teams can also form that reflect the identity, demographics and goals of those groups, like a religious congregation, a tenants association, a neighborhood association, a non-profit organization, etc.

Teams are encouraged to structure around a distributed management model that maximizes team productivity and enables clear communication among team members. Suggested team composition includes:

- Two Team Co-Chairs/Co-Leaders
- Interest Area Leads (i.e. – Youth, faith, business, education, ethnic groups, etc.)
- Operational Leads for sub teams (i.e. – Volunteer recruitment, space and scheduling logistics, event planning, material management, etc.).
  - **Volunteer Recruitment sub-teams are particularly important** because they will create the capacity to run activities and build awareness about civic engagement. You can never have too many volunteers.

It is important for our teams to **empower their volunteers** to become trusted voices in their community, to feel that **they are part of something larger than themselves**. If this happens, the message they will carry becomes that much more effective and powerful.

This model creates a structure that endures changes such as people leaving for illness or personal reasons. It provides team sustainability so that there are enough people to get the job done!

## HOW TO GET STARTED

THE KEY TO YOUR TEAM'S SUCCESS IS – LOTS OF VOLUNTEERS

### A Large Key To Our Success



**To get things done you're going to need people.**

- Volunteers are a must for your team's success
- You can never have too many volunteers
- You will always be recruiting volunteers
- A **Volunteer Recruitment sub-committee/sub-team will be a particularly important** part of each team. It is needed to focus on creating and managing the capacity needed to run activities and spread the word about the importance of civic engagement and voting

## WHY Do People Volunteer?

Because they were asked!

- Satisfaction from accomplishment
- To share a skill
- To learn a skill
- To gain leadership
- To demonstrate commitment to a cause
- To get to know a community
- To be busy
- To be an "insider"
- To be challenged
- For fun

JERSEY CIVIC ENGAGE

NJACE  
The Jersey Council for Civic Engagement

There are many great reasons that people volunteer. But **the main reason people volunteer is because they were asked.**

**Start by asking people in your community – however way you define that community - to volunteer. Here's how.**

## TIPS ON HOW TO ASK PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER

### HOW TO MAKE A 'HARD' **ASK** – 5 STEPS

1. Know your audience—tailor your ask, attitude, & language
2. Build urgency—explain why this work is important right now
3. Ask for something specific—date, time, activity and have alternatives ready
4. Ask and Stop Talking—Take yes for an answer
5. Be persistent—Get to “yes”



There are different ways to make an 'ask.' Your **goal**, whether it's to ask someone to volunteer to be part of the team or to participate in an activity, is to **get people to make a commitment**. One very effective way to do that is to use a method called a '**hard ask**'. It's different than a 'soft' ask, which is a more general request. The 'hard ask' is for a specific commitment to a specific activity on a specific date and at a specific time.

**The graphic above provides 5 steps to an effective 'hard ask'**. The only way to become effective at asking is to practice, so we suggest that you ask a fellow team member to practice with you. Simply create a fictitious event and then practice making an 'ask.' Check with each other to see if you've hit each of the five steps.

**Remember – In organizing, you get what you ask for and not much of what you don't!**

## WHERE DO YOU FIND VOLUNTEERS?

### Some Volunteer Recruitment Resources

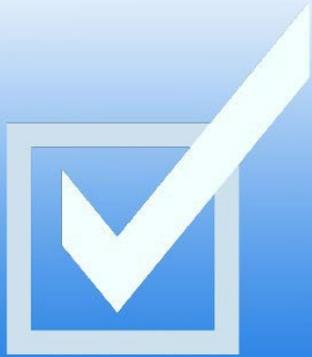
- Your existing networks – your friends & their friends, relatives, neighbors
- Community Organizations
- Local Partner Organizations
- Faith Community Congregants
- Social Media



**Now you're ready. All that you have to do is ask!**

## HOW DO YOU KEEP VOLUNTEERS INVOLVED AND RETAIN THEM?

### Volunteer Retention Best Practices



- Sign-in sheets
- Create a welcoming space
- Setting context
- Increasing responsibility
- Personal relationship
- Building skills
- Show appreciation



Your volunteers are the gold thread that weaves throughout your team and binds it together. Here are some ways to strengthen that thread:

- Sign-in Sheets - Always make sure your volunteers or event attendees sign in.
  - Use this information to create an email and phone contact list
- Create a Welcoming Space – Be sure to create a welcoming space for your activities
  - **People will come and volunteer for the issue, but they will return and stay because of you!**
- Set the Context - Always make sure that event attendees and volunteers understand the task at hand and what you are trying to accomplish
- Increase Responsibility - As you get to know your volunteers, increase their responsibilities
  - Identify their strengths and give them tasks that utilize those strengths
- Building Relationships - As a team leader, building relationships with your team members is important
  - Your job is to be a coach and a guide and to ensure that team members are able to carry out their responsibilities
- Building Skills - Be sure to continually provide resource materials to your team members
- Show Appreciation - You can never say thank you enough. Never let a volunteer or event attendee leave without saying thank you!

## BUILDING AN ACTION PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOALS

Each Team will develop and carry out its own unique action plan. We have provided some tools to help with developing those plans.

LCET members know the best way to reach the community, raise awareness and encourage community members to get involved. They will know how to carry out their plan most effectively.

### **Developing a clear and measurable Action Plan with Clear Goals**

Each LCET should create a unique action plan that identifies the team's central focus and goals. Examples include particular issues related to the community, engaging young and future voters, voter registration, voter education, civic learning forums, etc.

LCET members are best positioned to know how to reach the community, raise awareness, and encourage community members to get involved. They will know best how to effectively carry out their plan.

The plan should include tactics based on what the Team knows will work best in its community in order to create the conditions for the desired outcome.

The plan should view every activity as an opportunity to recruit needed volunteers.

**Your Team's plan should create timeframes associated with specific tasks.**

**To get you started here are suggested sample timeframes and some associated examples of tactics.**

### **SAMPLE: FOUR MONTH INITIAL LCET TEAM STRATEGY**

<b>MONTH 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Hold an initial team meeting and establish a time for recurring meetings moving forward</li><li>● Recruit volunteers!</li><li>● Begin planning and constructing your team's "Action Plan."</li><li>● Get on social media. Start posting about what the team is doing and how people can get involved.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Instagram, Facebook, Threads, Bluesky are all great ways to access a wider audience.</li></ul></li><li>● Develop and implement non-partisan activities designed to address the issue(s) you decide to focus on. For example, encourage citizens to understand the importance of voting including registering and committing to voting, regardless of party or candidate.</li><li>● Set a date for your next meeting.</li></ul>
<b>MONTH 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Choose, organize and conduct your initial activity! Focus on organizing and running activities that leverage upcoming civic holidays and other significant community events.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Examples: Constitution Week, National Voter Registration Day, National Voter Education Week, Vote Early Day, community</li></ul></li></ul>

	<p style="text-align: center;">celebrations and fairs, etc..</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop and implement non-partisan activities designed to motivate citizens to participate. For example, voting, regardless of party or candidate.</li> <li>● Celebrate your accomplishments!</li> </ul>
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<p><b>MONTHS 3 &amp; 4</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assess how to improve on the work you've already done.</li> <li>● Discuss the focus of the Team's activities moving forward.</li> <li>● Continue to plan and schedule activities to educate and engage. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Examples: Public information forums</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Continue recruiting more volunteers</li> <li>● Celebrate your accomplishments!</li> </ul>
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# PLAN YOUR TEAM'S FIRST ACTIVITY

One of the best ways to start organizing a team is to organize an activity in the community.

Schedule your first team meeting once you have several people who have agreed to be team members.

During that meeting Identify an initial activity, set a date, and begin organizing it. You can do this even while you are building your Action Plan. **There's no need to wait.**

**Here are tools to assist you with developing an Action Plan for your LCET.** Each of them has a download link to a shareable/printable version:

- **LCET Organizing Worksheet – A step by step process to start organizing your Team**

[Download a printable/shareable version of the LCET Organizing Worksheet](#)



**Local Civic Engagement Team Organizing Worksheet**

Discussion #1: Community

**Key Question: Who do you want to affect?** (Students, youth, local officials, a particular segment(s) of the community, etc.)

Discussion #2: Issues

**Key Question: What community issue(s) and/or project(s) do you want to work on? Prioritize them.** (e.g. - Voter engagement, voter registration, voter education & awareness, public education, public safety, community health, etc.)

Discussion #3: Resources

**Key Question: Resources can be tangible items (office space) or intangible (personal relationships or a career skill). How can we use our resources to build teams?**

What resources do we have as individuals? What resources do we have within our community?

How can those resources help us organize and build our team? How can we recruit more volunteers to our team?

Discussion #4: Volunteers & Teams

**Key Question: We know that volunteers who work in teams are more productive, happy, connected and powerful than volunteers working alone. What activities can we organize as a way to build our team?** (e.g. -Voter registration, voter education & awareness activities, community forums, faith breakfasts, community discussions about how to be civically engaged, etc. A larger list of suggested activities can be found in the LCET Toolkit )

Are there other groups/teams (i.e. - government, community or non-profit based, etc.) in our area working on the same or similar issues and activities? If Yes, how can we connect with them? Could they be a source for more volunteers for the team? If No, how can we support the development of teams?

How can our teams reflect our community (i.e. - Who needs to be on the team?)

Are there upcoming events where we can have a presence to reach people about issues?

Discussion #5: Commitments

**Key Question: What next steps will you take to build or solidify your team?**

Date of next meeting?

Date and type of next activity?

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- Activity Tracking Sheet

[Download a printable/shareable version of the Activity Tracking Sheet](#)

**ACTIVITY TRACKING SHEETS**

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the spaces below to add the goals you created

ACTIVITY NAME	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER

**ACTIVITY TRACKING SHEETS**

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the spaces below to add the goals you created

ACTIVITY NAME	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER

**ACTIVITY TRACKING SHEETS**

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the spaces below to add the goals you created

ACTIVITY NAME	APRIL	MAY	JUNE

**ACTIVITY TRACKING SHEETS**

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Use the spaces below to add the goals you created

ACTIVITY NAME	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH
Youth Civic Engagement Forum			
Voter Registration Tabling/Kiosk			
Interfaith Breakfast			
Civic Engagement Workshop			
Voter Awareness & Engagement Flyering			

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**Some possible activities include:**

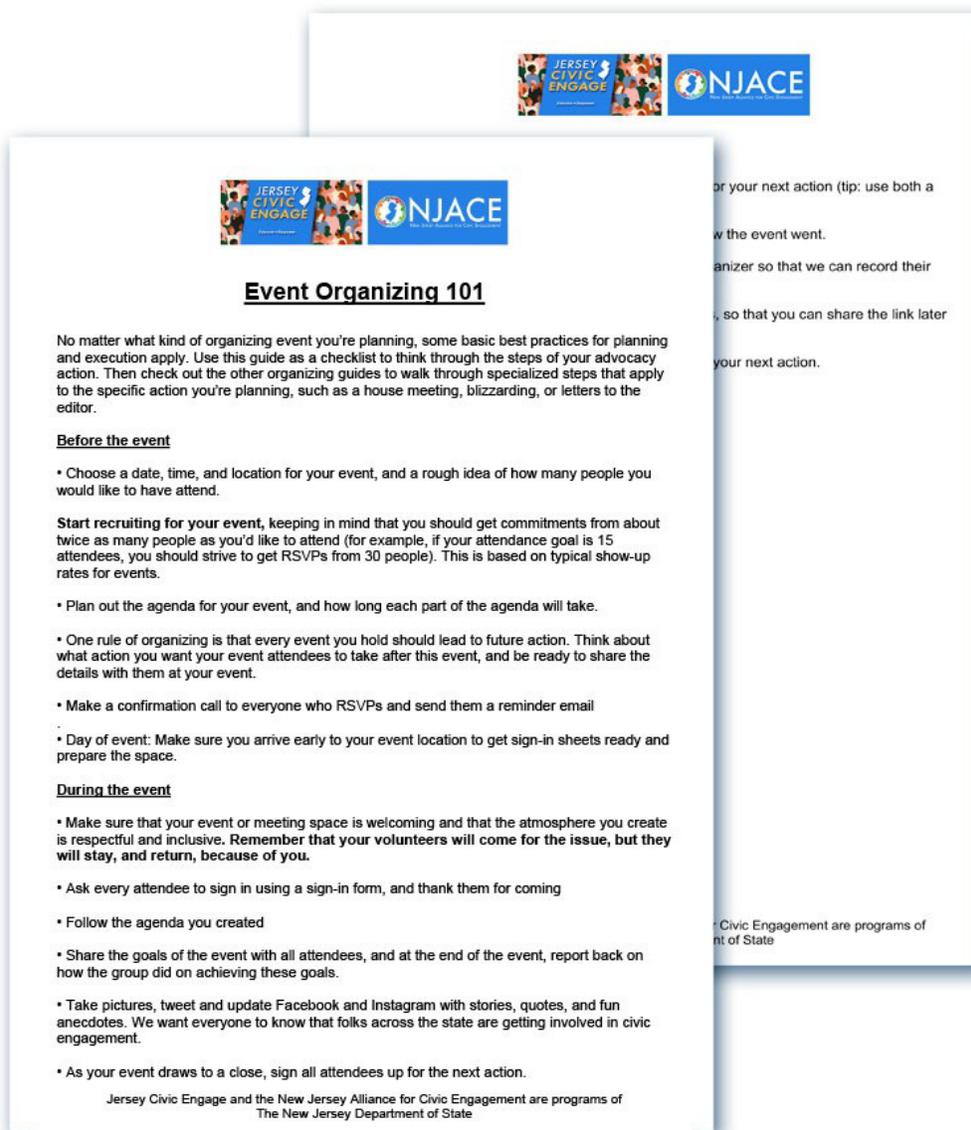
- Organize and host community events (in person or virtual) to educate and create awareness about voting
- Organize voter registration activities (i.e. – Voter registration and information kiosks, tabling at community events and fairs, etc.)
- Information forums about how to recognize misinformation & disinformation
- Conduct youth forums about civic engagement and voting
- Host interfaith breakfasts
- Organize community discussions about how to be civically engaged
- Organize an LCET kickoff meeting
- Provide school classroom resources
- Help recruit poll workers
- Incorporate civic engagement and voter related information in newsletters, social media posts, podcasts, mailings, and websites.
  - Form volunteer online action sub-teams to amplify civic engagement related information via social media
- Recruit volunteers
- Run non-partisan voter registration and commitment to vote contests
- Host community Civic Engagement Workshops. Topics could include How Your Town Government Works, How Your County Government Works, How to Influence Your Community Leaders and others
- Engage businesses and ask them to give out non-partisan materials regarding team activities and election related reminders
  - Focus on businesses that are in important social gathering places such as barber shops and beauty salons or bodegas
- Create education and awareness materials specific to the characteristics of your community
- Create a “Community Calendar” of civic engagement related events
- Run a Letter to the Editor activity to highlight your Team’s work

# ORGANIZING ACTIVITIES – BEST PRACTICES AND TACTICS

Here are several organizing tools and “How To” techniques that you can incorporate for use with the Civic Engagement related activities you conduct. Each of them has a download link to a shareable/printable version:

## Event Organizing 101 Guidance

[Download a printable/shareable version of Event Organizing 101 Guidance](#)



# Event Sign-In Sheet

[Download a printable/shareable version of Event Sign-In Sheet](#)



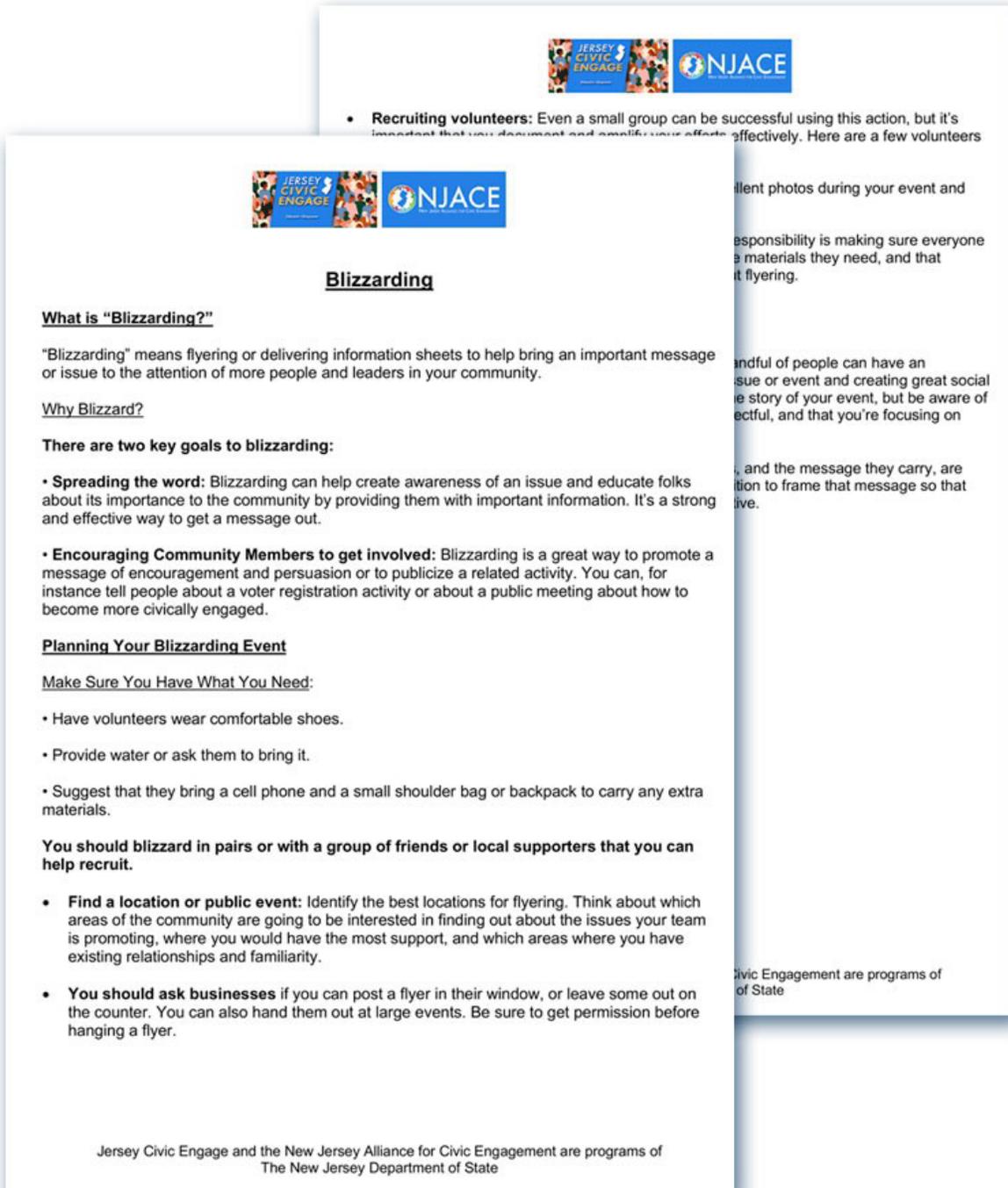
**EVENT:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

NAME	ADDRESS	CELL PHONE #	EMAIL	WANT TO VOLUNTEER?
				<input type="checkbox"/>

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## Blizzarding (Flyering) Guidance

[Download a printable/shareable version of Blizzarding \(Flyering\) Guidance](#)



The image shows a document titled "Blizzarding (Flyering) Guidance" with logos for "JERSEY CIVIC ENGAGE" and "NJACE". The document contains the following text:

**Blizzarding**

**What is "Blizzarding?"**

"Blizzarding" means flyering or delivering information sheets to help bring an important message or issue to the attention of more people and leaders in your community.

**Why Blizzard?**

**There are two key goals to blizzarding:**

- **Spreading the word:** Blizzarding can help create awareness of an issue and educate folks about its importance to the community by providing them with important information. It's a strong and effective way to get a message out.
- **Encouraging Community Members to get involved:** Blizzarding is a great way to promote a message of encouragement and persuasion or to publicize a related activity. You can, for instance tell people about a voter registration activity or about a public meeting about how to become more civically engaged.

**Planning Your Blizzarding Event**

**Make Sure You Have What You Need:**

- Have volunteers wear comfortable shoes.
- Provide water or ask them to bring it.
- Suggest that they bring a cell phone and a small shoulder bag or backpack to carry any extra materials.

**You should blizzard in pairs or with a group of friends or local supporters that you can help recruit.**

- **Find a location or public event:** Identify the best locations for flyering. Think about which areas of the community are going to be interested in finding out about the issues your team is promoting, where you would have the most support, and which areas where you have existing relationships and familiarity.
- **You should ask businesses** if you can post a flyer in their window, or leave some out on the counter. You can also hand them out at large events. Be sure to get permission before hanging a flyer.

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## Letters to the Editor (LTE) Guidance

[Download a printable/shareable version of Letters to the Editor Guidance](#)

**JERSEY CIVIC ENGAGE** **NJACE**  
The New Jersey Alliance for Civic Engagement

### Writing Letters to the Editor

**What is a “Letter to the Editor” (LTE)?**

A letter to the editor is a short letter to a local newspaper, news site or publication that gives your opinion on an issue and can call on others in your community to take action.

**Why Write an LTE?**

The letter to the editor section is one of the most widely read parts of most newspapers and news sites. These letters can:

- Raise awareness. An LTE is a great way to raise the profile of an issue in your local community and educate the public.
- Respond rapidly to new developments. Many publications print LTEs within a day or two of receiving them, making them one of the most effective actions when trying to respond quickly to new developments or announcements.
- Energize supporters and leaders. Published letters energize local supporters on important issues.
- Be persuasive. Persuading others is a way to involve them in the civic life of their community. It's a chance to explain how and why it's important to have a stake in what happens in a community.

**People Read LTEs to Find Out:**

- How certain issues are affecting their community.
- What are the major impacts of those issues?

**However, people do not read LTEs for:**

- In-depth policy descriptions. **Keep it short.** LTEs should be short and demonstrate your personal connection to an issue and the views of local community members. You don't have to be an expert on an issue to share your personal story. Most papers and news sites will not print or select letters that are too long or try to outline an entire policy issue.

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## MEASURING YOUR SUCCESS

It is important to be able to track your progress as a team. It will help you to tell the big story of your team's work and celebrate that work. It is helpful to include photos and any personal stories from events or actions. This will help you/us tell a compelling story and hopefully get press/ earned (free) media coverage.

You can use the **LCET Activity Tracking Sheet** provided above to record your results.

We will be providing a link for you to report your activities so that we can use those to celebrate our accomplishments. As soon as the tool becomes available, we'll share it with you.

## WE ARE HERE TO HELP

We will periodically be updating this toolkit and providing additional resources for your teams and the NJACE coalition. If you have questions, ideas or need help please feel free to contact us at [NJDOS@sos.nj.gov](mailto:NJDOS@sos.nj.gov) . Thank you for everything you do!