

## **MAKE POVERTY PUBLIC**

### **CELEBRATION OF HUMANITY: ORGANIZING AN ALL CANDIDATES MEETING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY**

All candidates meetings are a good opportunity to hear from your local candidates on the issues *you* care about. However, they can become platforms for candidates to talk about the issues *they* care about or to provide a “laundry list” of election promises. This brief guide will support you in keeping the focus on your community and your issues by providing practical steps for hosting a Celebration of Humanity, an all candidates meeting with a “twist.”

In a Celebration of Humanity, the event is focused on story-telling from the community not on the candidates. The candidate’s role is to listen, to summarize what they have heard about the issues of the community, and to answer accountability questions with a yes or no answer.

The aim of the event is to Make Poverty Public through telling the stories of some of those living in poverty in your community, connecting those stories to the root causes, and showing candidates the power of the community in holding them accountable to their response.

#### **CENTRAL FEATURES OF CELEBRATIONS OF HUMANITY**

- Influential community groups as organizers and audience
- Powerful, diverse stories from people with lived experience of poverty
- Funded support for people in poverty to participate
- Targeted accountability question(s) aligned with systemic community issues
- Large audience

## ORGANIZING OVERVIEW

1. Connect with other groups in your community and invite them to be part of the organizing committee.
  - ◆ Target influential groups – such as faith, labour, business, and local government
  - ◆ Reach out to groups working on the issues of poverty, inequality and homelessness – such as community organizations, service agencies, indigenous communities, and advocacy groups.
2. Confirm the date, time and location as early as possible.
  - ◆ Choose an accessible location central to the community, perhaps a church, community centre, school, or neighbourhood house, etc.
3. Contact the candidates' campaign managers and secure a commitment.
  - ◆ Highlight the non-partisan nature of the event.
  - ◆ If one of the candidates does not take part, make sure to include a comment that all were invited in the event introduction and reserve a seat with a visible sign of their name to mark their absence.
4. To build the audience, set up an online registration process and set quotas for members of the organizing committee, e.g. each group will commit to bring 10 or 20 members.
  - ◆ Design promotional material to reach the general public – posters, social media posts, etc.
5. Identify and support the story-tellers from the organizing groups (see page 4).

### ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTION(S)

**BC has the second highest poverty rate in Canada yet it is now the only province without a poverty reduction plan. Will you and your party commit to a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines?**

Ask this question and 2-4 others focused on specific issues of importance within your community. If possible, align the questions to issues raised by the story-tellers.

See the Make Poverty Public election toolkit for sample questions on the cost of poverty, income assistance, jobs, housing, health, food security, child poverty, child care, education, and equity.

6. Strike a small logistics committee to work on site logistics, cultural opening, indigenous welcome, volunteers, accessibility (including ASL, gender-neutral washrooms, etc.), during event issues, etc.
7. Choose 1 or 2 moderators from the organizing committee who are high profile figures in the community and understand the issues well.
8. Establish a candidate liaison person to prepare candidates for the event format, be available for candidates' arrival and departure, and support candidates if they have questions or concerns before, during or after the event.
9. After the meeting, send a brief thank you letter from all the organizations involved to each candidate providing an overview of the event themes and expressing support to continue working with them on their promises. This is the first stage of holding them accountable.

### **Promoting your Event**

- ◆ Add your event to event listings in your local media outlets (print and online).
- ◆ Share the event details with us and we will promote through our social media platforms and add the event to our website.
- ◆ Consider setting up a Facebook event page to promote the event and invite friends.
- ◆ Share the poster/meme through social media and organize volunteers to put up posters in the community.
- ◆ The day before, send out a press release to your local media outlets with the details of your event. If you have time, follow up with phone calls to specific reporters that you think are sympathetic to the issues. Connect them with story-tellers who are comfortable doing media interviews, as well as representatives from the organizing committee who know the issues in depth.
- ◆ Post on social media during your event with photos and quotes from speakers. Tag us on Facebook ([@BCPovertyReductionCoalition](#)) or Twitter ([@PovReductionBC](#)) and share with us by using [#MakePovertyPublic](#)

# STORY-TELLING

Kelowna recently passed a by-law prohibiting people from sitting on the sidewalk day or night. Apparently, there had been complaints of “sidewalk obstructions.” We have dehumanized people to the extent that homeless people are now just “sidewalk obstructions.” Celebrations of Humanity are intended to re-humanize people in poverty so that we can no longer step over or look away from our neighbours. Stories are the most effective way of doing this.

## Supporting story-tellers:

1. Identify 4 or 5 people in poverty or people who have experience in poverty connected to the groups that are involved in the organizing committee if possible.
  - ◆ Pay attention to diversity of people and issue, and choose those that have experience with the issues the organizing committee want to focus on.
  - ◆ Ensure the provision of honoraria for story-tellers and other supports necessary for them to participate in the training and event, e.g. child care, transportation reimbursement, food, etc.
2. Establish a story-teller liaison or small committee to contact each story-teller to ask them about their experience and organize 1-2 training session(s).
  - ◆ Work with story-tellers to connect their personal experience with the systemic causes by providing the broader context of the issues – use Long Overdue: Why BC Needs a Poverty Reduction Plan at [MakePovertyPublic.ca](http://MakePovertyPublic.ca) and other community sources.
  - ◆ Make the stories concise and accessible through written and oral practice within this supportive group.
  - ◆ Be available for storytellers’ arrival and departure, and support them if they have questions or concerns before, during or after the event.
3. Support story-tellers in becoming media spokespeople for the event with training and coaching.
4. If the story-tellers are comfortable being more public, please encourage them to take part in our **See Me photo project**.
  - ◆ Provide a sign that says See Me and take a close-up photo of them holding the sign.
  - ◆ We’ll use the photo to show the diversity of people living in poverty throughout BC. Please email your photos to: [info@bcpovertyreduction.ca](mailto:info@bcpovertyreduction.ca)
5. Meet with the story-tellers after the event, either individually or as a group, to support them through closing the process.

## SAMPLE AGENDA

<b>6 pm</b>	<b>Brief introduction</b> <b>Cultural opening</b>	<p>An expression of your community, e.g. school/community choir, lion dancers, drumming circle, youth spoken word, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>this is a great way to set the tone of the event and provide a window for latecomers.</i></li> </ul>
<b>6:30 pm</b>	<b>Introduction</b> <b>Indigenous welcome</b>	<p>1 or 2 MCs outline the format of the event and other activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>brief intro to the poverty reduction plan and 7 pillars, including how community themes fit in</i></li> <li>• <i>highlight voting dates including advanced voting</i></li> <li>• <i>encourage social media using the hashtag #MakePovertyPublic – have a sign displayed throughout event if possible.</i></li> </ul> <p>Acknowledgement of local indigenous territories.</p>
<b>6:40 pm</b>	<b>Roll call</b>	<p>If you have enough groups involved in the organizing committee or partnering in the event (over 5), have a representative from each group come up to the microphone to name the group and invite their members to stand or raise their hand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>this is a good way to encourage attendance from partnering groups.</i></li> </ul>
<b>7 pm</b>	<b>Storytelling</b>	<p>4-5 speakers connecting the themes of the community to their personal stories and the need for government action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>2-3 minutes for each speaker; expect slippage but don't allow more than 5 minutes if possible.</i></li> </ul>
<b>7:20 pm</b>	<b>Short break</b>	Strict 10 minutes
<b>7:30 pm</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<p>MCs summarize issues and ask accountability questions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>use slideshow if possible to make the questions more visible and keep them up during the candidates response.</i></li> </ul>
<b>7:35 pm</b>	<b>Candidates respond</b>	<p>Each candidate given a strict 5 minutes to summarize what they heard about the community issues and to respond to the questions with yes/no answers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>MCs may need to push them to give a clear yes or no.</i></li> </ul>
<b>7:55 pm</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<p>Express support for working with those candidates who have responded favourably – offer the expertise of the groups involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Highlight petition/sign-up sheet for those who want an update on where the parties stand on all the pillars of the poverty reduction plan.</i></li> </ul>
<b>8 pm</b>	<b>Thanks and good night!</b>	Try to finish on time.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Get Out the Vote

Only 55% of eligible voters voted in the last provincial election so encourage more voters by organizing a Get Out the Vote activity at your all candidates meeting (or at other community events). Focus on getting out the poor vote. Download Samara Canada's [Vote PopUp guide](#) and [contact them](#) to order your free Vote PopUp toolkit, which includes a mock voting booth and ballot box to set up at community events.

### Take Action Table

Provide resources at an information table for those who like to know more about the state of poverty in BC. See our resources section at [MakePovertyPublic.ca](#). Please let us know if you'd like some print copies mailed to you – specify the title and numbers of each report.

Encourage people to sign the petition available for printing here – highlight the check box for people to sign up to our [e-newsletter list](#) to get more information about political party promises and other news.

Encourage people to sign [We Can't Afford Poverty](#) postcards. Please let us know how many postcards and buttons you would like for your event.



## Photo Booth

Help raise public awareness about how we can reduce poverty. Print multiple copies of [this sign](#), encourage people to fill it in (suggestions below), and send us a photo of them holding it. We'll use the photo to show how people are supporting a Poverty Reduction Plan throughout BC. Please email your photos to: [info@bcpovertyreduction.ca](mailto:info@bcpovertyreduction.ca)

You're also welcome to post it yourself on your own social media channels. If you decide to share your photo, please use the hashtag [#MakePovertyPublic](#)

Suggested themes, which you could print and make available to start the ball rolling:

- ◆ Increasing welfare/disability
- ◆ \$15 minimum wage
- ◆ Affordable housing
- ◆ \$10 a day child care
- ◆ Funding our schools
- ◆ Pharmacare
- ◆ Seniors care
- ◆ Eliminating MSPs
- ◆ Other community themes

Also provide See Me signs for those who self-identify as living in poverty and want to take part in the **See Me photo project**.



*"Because poverty isn't a problem that needs to be fixed; it is a wound that needs to be healed. It is a wound in the flesh of community that labels and separates us into competitive fearful camps. And it wounds all of us."*

- Derek Cook, Canada Without Poverty

For more election resources, visit:

[makepovertypublic.ca](http://makepovertypublic.ca)

[#MakePovertyPublic](https://twitter.com/MakePovertyPublic)

For more background information, visit:

[bcpovertyreduction.ca](http://bcpovertyreduction.ca)

*Acknowledgement to the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which uses this model in their organizing work, and to the Metro Vancouver Alliance, affiliate of IAF, where we saw this format in action.*

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is a coalition that includes community and non-profit groups, faith groups, health organizations, First Nations and Aboriginal organizations, businesses, labour organizations, and social policy groups. We have come together around a campaign aimed at seeing the introduction of a bold and comprehensive poverty reduction plan from the government of British Columbia that would include legislated targets and timelines to significantly reduce poverty, inequality and homelessness. We seek to improve the health and well-being of all British Columbians. We have over 50 Coalition Members and over 400 supporting organizations that have joined the call for a poverty reduction plan.

Any election advertising in this guide is authorized by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, registered sponsor under the *Election Act*, 604-877-4553.

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