



ACLU-NC Activist Toolkit: Tabling at Community Events

Whether you are an experienced activist or someone taking action for the first time, the [ACLU of Northern California](http://www.aclunc.org) is here to help every step of the way. Visit our Web site at www.aclunc.org.

The [ACLU-NC Action Center](http://www.aclunc.org/action/activist_toolkit) contains many resources for activists, including this Activist Toolkit with detailed instructions on everything an activist needs. Download instructions and tips on these topics from www.aclunc.org/action/activist_toolkit:

- Running an effective meeting
- Tabling at community events
- Writing an advocacy letter
- Hosting an event for your friends and neighbors
- Publicizing an event
- Planning a campaign

This part of the toolkit will teach you how to have a fun and effective table at a public event, with helpful information on these important topics.

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What is Tabling?

“Tabling” is a fun and creative way to engage members of the public and provide information on civil liberties issues. People are naturally interested in current events and compelling issues.

A “table” is an eye-catching display on any surface—a table or even an ironing board or park bench—that lets you share printed information—flyers, buttons, bumperstickers, action items, and other materials—with the public and engage interested individuals in conversation.

Why Table?

There are many benefits to tabling. A visually appealing space staffed by knowledgeable and friendly activists will:

- educate the public and raise awareness of the ACLU and its work
- change opinions
- gain new ACLU members
- allow interested individuals to sign up as e-activists
- give voice to voters' civil liberties concerns through petition signatures or letters to elected officials
- offer committed activists a chance to make a difference

Where to Table?

The two most important factors in choosing a table location are

- great visibility
- lots of foot traffic

Any location with a large number of people who have the time to stop and look at information makes a great tabling spot. Some effective choices include:

- political events, demonstrations, or marches
- arts & crafts fairs or music festivals
- local community locations such as malls, grocery stores, farmers' markets or downtown pedestrian zones
- conferences or small events
- central campus areas, such as common study areas, dining areas or food courts, or libraries

Resources for finding good tabling locations include the local Chamber of Commerce, Department of Parks & Recreation, or Tourist Board for lists of upcoming events and festivals.

Planning Your Table

These easy steps will help make for a successful tabling effort.

1. You will want a minimum of two people (three is ideal). One person can staff the table and help with literature handout, petition or letter signing, member sign-up, and donations, while the other person, or people, actively engage passers-by with printed information or polite questions.
2. It is best to divide tabling into shifts so volunteers can take breaks and know they will work for a finite amount of time.

3. Tabling works best if your activists are willing and able to step out in front of the table and engage passers-by in conversation. High-energy and enthusiastic tablers will have fun, and people will be curious about what they are doing.
4. In preparing for your table, first decide on your message. Is it “Join the ACLU,” or “Sign a letter to your representative,” or “Become a member of our e-mail list”? Have **ONE** thing you want people to do. This allows you to be efficient and keeps the public interested and engaged. (A small percentage of people will want to know more and will engage you in lengthy conversation, which is when a third volunteer is or helpful.)
5. Contact event sponsors in advance to find out about their policies and procedures. Are there registration fees? Will a table be provided? What size is your space? Do regulations require permission from a local public authority or event organizers? Can you accept donations for small items such as T-shirts, hats, buttons, or bumperstickers? (For many events, fees may be reduced or waived for 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations such as the ACLU. [Contact Field Staff](mailto:organizing@aclunc.org) at organizing@aclunc.org in advance of the event to obtain proof of tax-exempt status.)
6. Set a goal for your tabling effort. How many signed letters are you hoping to gather? How many new members do you want to sign up? How many people do you want to speak with?

What to Bring: A Handy Checklist

- Table (one or two folding card tables are ideal)
- Tablecloth or other attractive covering
- Chairs
- ACLU banner and/or colorful posters
- Literature. Plan your literature based on the tabling goal. [Contact ACLU-NC staff](mailto:organizing@aclunc.org) at organizing@aclunc.org for attractive and informative materials.
- Paperweights, binder clips, rocks or bungy cords stretched across a table to hold down materials and prevent them from blowing away (rubber-bands can make it difficult for people to pick up literature)
- An action item so people can have the experience of taking action right at the moment: newsletter signup, letter to write or sign, petition, etc.
- Clipboards with pens attached with string or rubber bands (extra pens are useful to have)
- Sign-up sheets for new members, volunteers, or e-mail activists
- If you are tabling for an ACLU-NC chapter, handout with meeting information listing date, time, and location of chapter meetings
- Tape (for posting banner and displaying posters or literature)
- Items for donations or give-away: buttons, bumper stickers, t-shirts, hats, refrigerator magnets
- Donation jar (start it off with a few dollar bills and maybe one or two large bills)
- Optional: Candy, cookies, or other treats to attract people and provide volunteer snacks
- Optional: Cell phones--if volunteers have free weekend minutes, let people call a legislator right from the event

Preparing Your Volunteers

It helps to prepare volunteers, especially volunteers new to tabling. Remind them of the goal of the table. Make sure they know the basics about the ACLU-NC, the local chapter, and the literature. It's often a good idea to pair a new volunteer with more experienced tablers.

Consider role-playing with new volunteers. Pretend to be a passer-by and let them practice what they might say and how to answer one or two questions. A good opening question is, "Are you familiar with the work of the ACLU?" Or "Did you know the ACLU is" Tell volunteers it's OK to answer difficult questions with "I don't know, but if you want to leave contact information, we can get an answer for you."

And most of all, remind your volunteers to **HAVE FUN!**

A Note About Interacting With the Public

Generally, you will find people receptive and friendly, or they will simply walk by you. You don't have to engage *every* person. The "out-front" volunteer should be enthusiastic and engaging, but not aggressive.

Some people will want to talk, others will simply want to look at, read, and take literature. Some people may have questions or wish to engage in conversation. Be friendly and let the public engage with you as they wish.

On occasion, you will encounter someone who wants to engage in debate or argument. **Don't.** A loud or animated conversation will keep truly interested people away. Respect someone's difference of opinion and be polite, but use your time efficiently; spend it with people who want to take action or whose mind can be changed.

If someone is especially interested, be sure to ask for contact information, and invite them to an upcoming meeting or activity.

Tabling is a great way of engaging with the broader public about civil liberties issues, getting people engaged in actions, and signing up new members. It is also a fun and dynamic way of interacting with your community on civil liberties issues important to you.