

How To Organize

A “Move the Money” Bus Tour

The Maryland coalition Fund Our Communities, Not the Pentagon organized an all-day bus tour in March 2013, designed to showcase underfunded community needs contrasted with Pentagon spending. Here are the steps you’ll need to take:

Enlist as many cosponsoring organizations as possible, from all groups within the community. Reach out to labor, religious congregations, human needs groups, and others.

Determine a date. Decision criteria might include a time that would provide the potential for maximum political impact, such as near when an important budget is expected to be publicly released (e.g., House, Senate, President’s, Congressional Progressive Caucus).

Select a tentative route for the bus and identify possible stops. Engage organizations in each community where you hope to have a stop. Select a “site organizer” for each stop on the bus. Each site organizer should “own” his or her site and be prepared to:

- Organize a formal program in collaboration with local groups;
- Conduct extensive outreach to the community to secure attendance, both on the bus and at the local site; and
- Assist with media outreach.

The Maryland tour focused on different community needs for each stop. For example, one stop spotlighted schools, another social safety net programs, and a third community-wide needs such as libraries and parks. Addressing a different need at each stop will enable you to demonstrate a broad array of social problems and engage a diverse set of groups in your coalition.

Rent a bus. You will probably need to do this about two months prior to the tour. Secure other AV needs, such as a portable microphone.

Ensure that local site organizers secure speakers and artists for each program in a timely manner. All local site organizers should be strongly encouraged to find some kind of artistic presentation as part of the program. Local site organizers should also seek to find individuals from the community who can describe from a personal perspective the community need that is being addressed. And finally, community leaders, such as ministers, labor leaders, community organizers and politicians should be invited to speak—briefly. The program for each stop should not exceed about 40 minutes in length.

Check to see if you will need permits for any outdoor locations or if you need to reserve or rent indoor space.

Hold regular conference calls with the local site organizers, to ensure that everyone is on-message and that logistical and program details are handled appropriately.

Once you have an itinerary for the bus, drive it yourself and test out the times needed to travel between sites. Review the availability of parking (for the bus and for local participants who will attend). If the program will be held outside, ensure that the location is suitable.

Develop carefully timed programs for each site and identify a timekeeper for the tour as a whole. You will need to stay exactly on target with the times, since there will be groups and speakers waiting for you at each successive stop.

Publicize, publicize, publicize! You want to attract crowds at each stop on the tour and you also want to fill up your bus. E-mail, social media, web sites, community calendars, personal invitations, fliers—everything you can think of will be necessary. Ask all speakers and all co-sponsoring groups to advertise the tour.

Do all you can to obtain media coverage. Send out at least two media advisories and, upon completion of the bus tour, a press release. Call members of the media and pitch the tour to them.

Develop fliers for each stop that include the names of speakers and performers, as well as trade-off statements, comparing the particular need being addressed with some outrageous Pentagon spending. The fliers can also identify an action step for participants to take. For example, Maryland prepared this trade-off:

Due to “sequestration,” 10,000 fewer high-risk pregnant and nursing women and their babies will receive nutritional supplements through the WIC program. To fly one F-35 plane for 10 hours equals the cost of all WIC cuts in MD for one month.

Use the trade-off examples in the spoken programs at each stop, in media outreach, and in any printed materials you develop for the tour.

Use strong visuals. For example, the Maryland bus tour used the 100-foot long banner available from the American Friends Service Committee, a chart of the discretionary budget. If you can, **have a videographer participate on the tour** and make a short video that you can use afterwards to promote your message.

Thanks to Jean Athey, Montgomery County Peace Action, MD for coming up with this brilliant idea in October 2012!