

Outreach & Teacher Selection

With all the players in place — the state organizer, the Secretary of the State, appropriate co-sponsors, and a lead teacher—and with a promotional brochure in hand, you are ready to launch your outreach to teachers.

The Capitol Forum has been designed for social studies teachers of grades nine through twelve, but the forum materials can be integrated into a variety of courses: history, current events, world studies, economics, public speaking, etc. The materials may also be suitable for interdisciplinary courses. The Capitol Forum is designed to include students of all ability levels. The program is strongest when participating students represent the full range of diversity within your state. We recommend that you look for twenty teachers in your first year and then decide, based upon your own experience, whether this is the right number for your state in the future.

Outreach and Application Process

Outreach to teachers should begin in the spring, early enough that teachers are not already buried in end-of-year exams, grading, and clean-up. It will continue through the summer and can continue into the first few weeks of school in the fall. You will need to set your final deadline for applications early enough in the fall to make final selections, notify candidates, and give them at least two

weeks to set up classroom substitutes and prepare for your fall workshop.

There will be several forms of outreach—direct mail to teachers and principals, outreach through professional networks, media coverage, and personal contacts. Not one of these methods alone will prove sufficient to attract a strong, diverse pool of teacher candidates. You will want to employ each, and some of your own devising.

Direct Mail: the State Brochure

Your program brochure will be your primary outreach piece. You will not only use it for direct mail but also as a description of the program in all other outreach. The brochure includes a brief description of the program, a list of sponsors and co-sponsors, an outline of dates and responsibilities. The brochure will be produced by each state, but Choices will provide a Word document template as an electronic file. Your state's teacher application form will also be available in an electronic form for you to use to create your own application.

We recommend that you begin with a mailing in the spring directly to teachers. What lists will you use? Possibilities include:

- Choices Education Program mailing list of teachers in your state
- State Council for the Social Studies membership list
- State Department of Education lists
- State Humanities Council lists

Attracting Media Coverage

The Omaha World Herald served as a co-sponsor (and funder) of the First Capitol Forum in Nebraska. While such an arrangement does not guarantee coverage, you will at least have the ear of and advice from media professionals as you promote your program.

The Capitol Forum program is tailor-made for local media coverage. Be sure to send media releases about and photos of local students and teachers to the appropriate media offices. Encourage teachers and students to make their own contacts too.

Don't forget that, as a partner in this program, your Secretary of State can help you gain media attention. Typically, they are set up to handle media relations on an on-going basis and usually have connections that can be very helpful.

Remember

When doing any publicity on the Capitol Forum, you will want to give proper credit to your co-sponsors and funders.

We also ask that you include in your publicity that the Capitol Forum is a program of the Choices for the 21st Century Education Program at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies.

We also recommend that you do a mailing to high school principals. This could be done before school closes in the spring or in early August in preparation for the reopening of school. Depending on your circumstances, you may choose to send this to all principals or to principals in targeted areas. When you mail to principals, you will want to provide them with everything they will need to pass along to a potential teacher candidate or department chair. We recommend two to three copies of the brochure, a copy of the application form (which can be reproduce and distributed as needed), and at least one copy of the Ballot Report from the previous year.

A warning: Do not expect that direct mail

alone will suffice. Outreach to teachers—like any other group—is labor intensive. It often requires several encounters before an idea really hits home. While it may be the brochure that a teacher responds to, an article in their Council for the Social Studies newsletter, a note from the principal or from a parent, or an announcement at a professional development workshop may be what triggered the response.

Educators Networks

There are lots of places to cross paths with social studies teachers professionally. If your State Council for the Social Studies is a co-sponsor of the program, perhaps they will run an article or notice in their spring newsletter. If they have a web site, as noted in the media section of this chapter, they may also be willing to link to yours or to your state's page on the Choices Capitol Forum site: www.choices.edu.

Think about your other co-sponsors. Are any of them running teacher workshops in the spring or summer? Perhaps they would be willing to include brochures in their workshop folders. Or perhaps there will be a literature table at the workshop where you can display

Sample Media Relations Cycle

Goals:

- To recruit a diverse group of schools and teachers to participate in the Capitol Forum program.
- To promote overall awareness of the forum with educators, officials, general public in your state.
- To lay a foundation for promoting the forum for the next program year.

Media Release Sequence:

- March: Announce program, invite applications
- Aug./Sept.: Application deadline
- November: Announce participating schools and teachers
(Could include photo of teachers at Introductory Workshop with Secretary of the State and/or organizers)
- February: Capitol Forum schedule, invitation to media to cover event
- May/June: Student Ballot results (With photos from forum)

brochures and application forms. There might also be an opportunity for you (or them) to give a short presentation on the Capitol Forum at the workshop.

Are there other professional networks that are offering workshops or conferences? Possibilities include your state Geography Alliance, Economic Alliance, History Day organization, or a university-based teacher outreach program. They too may be willing to loan their mailing lists or display literature on the Capitol Forum at their program(s). Look as well for continuing education programs that might attract teachers throughout the summer.

Press Coverage and Other Media

The topic of media coverage will come up throughout the Capitol Forum program year. Press coverage—particularly local press coverage—can be very helpful in getting information about the program to prospective teachers. The participation of your Secretary of State's office can be very helpful as they are usually well positioned to issue press releases and have them picked up by the press.

Don't ignore the Internet as a medium for promoting your program. If you have a web page and have information about your Capitol Forum on it, consider linking it to the Choices site (www.choices.edu) and let us know so that we can link from our information to your site. You might also ask your State Department of Education, your State Council for the Social Studies, and any other co-sponsors to link to your posting.

Word of Mouth

When planning your outreach strategy, don't forget the effectiveness of old-fashioned word-of-mouth. Often the recommendations of friends and colleagues is the greatest motivator. Encourage the use of these informal channels wherever you can. Ask teachers you know who might be a logical candidate? Ask teachers who are already excited about the program whether they know others for whom this program would be a perfect addition to their classroom teaching. Ask parents of high

Provide an email announcement that can be circulated

Send an email to all of the teachers participating asking them to forward it to other teachers who may be interested. Include a clickable URL to the web page for the program and to the application form.

school students who in their school might be interested. Think about schools that you really want to target and consider who you know with contacts in the school. Enlist the help of your board members and fellow staff. They may have contacts that you do not.

Don't forget how helpful your Secretary of State can be in spreading the word. He or she is out meeting with groups across the state all the time. Make sure s/he has plenty of program brochures on hand to distribute. One of the people at that meeting could well be a high school teacher or a parent of a high school student or a neighbor of a school principal. Secretaries of State also go to schools to talk with students. Again, he or she will want to have some brochures to distribute to interested teachers.

Working with Your Lead Teacher

Your lead teacher can also help in the recruiting process by giving you a read on approaches that will be effective in your state. He or she would also be a good source of advice on how to "market" the program in ways that will be appealing to teachers. Are there state standards that are served by the Capitol Forum program? Are teachers in your state looking for professional development credits? What is a reasonable fee to charge to participating schools?

Remember that the lead teacher will serve as a member of your selection committee and as such will want to maintain a level of objectivity when he or she talks to potential teacher applicants about the program.

Teacher Selection and Notification

The review of applications and selection of teachers is a process best assigned to a committee. As mentioned above, your lead teacher will be an essential member of this group. You may also want to invite representatives of your co-sponsor organizations. Look for committee members who can bring varied perspectives to the process and who would appreciate the opportunity to shape your program from the inside.

We have recommended that you consider applications on a rolling basis beginning about four weeks prior to the start of the school year. You should schedule two selection committee meetings, the first several days after your published early review date and the second a few days after the final application deadline in September. We recommend that during the first candidate review you sort your candidates into three categories: yes, maybe, and no. This will allow you to respond early to those in the “yes” category giving you an opportunity to secure early commitments. You can hold the maybe pile until the final application deadline and compare the maybes against the new applicants. We suggest you hold the “no” pile to respond to after the final selection meeting.

You may want to collaborate with your committee to establish criteria for selection to your program. The application asks teachers to provide short answers to questions about their school and community profile as well as their teaching experience and style.

Note: In judging individual applications, your committee will be looking for evidence of

a match between the teacher and Choices' interactive, student-centered methodology. This does not mean that you are looking only for teachers with experience with Choices. Look for teachers whose application responses give evidence of enthusiasm for civic education and a willingness to adapt their curriculum to meet the program requirements.

The committee will want to make its selections with an eye toward balancing the final group of participating classes for age, skill-level, and demographic and geographic considerations. Likewise, the teacher group will be a mix of novices and veterans.

Because your teachers are signing on for a yearlong program with ramifications for their classroom teaching, the sooner you can notify them of their acceptance the better. This is critical following your final selection committee meeting in the fall when you will have only a few weeks to get commitment forms back from teachers and to send them materials for the Introductory Workshop.

Securing Commitments

Because of the limited number of spaces available for the Capitol Forum program, you will want to remind applicants throughout the recruiting and selection process of the commitment required.

Note: Teachers must commit to completion of all pre-forum and post-forum lesson plans and to participation at two preparatory meetings—the introductory workshop in the fall and the pre-forum planning meeting in the winter—as well as the forum. They must also commit to doing the post-forum lesson

Getting Ahead on the Introductory Workshop

At the introductory workshop, participating teachers will be asked to select two curriculum units from a list of twenty seven. In order to give them more time to think about topics that will fit into their curriculum, some states provide a copy of the Choices publications brochure in advance of the workshop. They can be included in the acceptance package sent to teachers. Alternatively, teachers can be sent to the Choices Program web site to review the resources available.

and balloting promptly following the forum in order to have student responses included in the ballot report.

The promotional brochure and teacher's application both stress these dates and deadlines. The application also asks for the signature of a principal as a means of assuring that the school's administration is likewise committed to supporting the applicant teacher and to providing funding for program fees, substitutes, transportation, etc.

Each accepted teacher's package will include a letter of commitment that highlights the program requirements once again and asks for signatures from both the teacher and school administration. You may also ask for payment of a participation fee at this time. The fee should be substantial enough to reaffirm the commitment of the teacher and school yet not so high as to be an undue burden. You may also offer to waive the fee for school districts whose budgets simply will not allow for even a modest participation fee.

Scheduling the Introductory Workshop

The introductory workshop is one of three days that participating teachers will need to attend. In order to reduce the number of days out of school, a couple of states have moved this first program up to late summer. Others have experimented with Saturday programming. Many factors must be considered in planning the appropriate timing for this. If you are interested in alternative scheduling and wish to hear how others have approached this, give us a call at the Choices office. We can also put you in touch with organizers in other states.