

Post-Forum Activities

The Capitol Forum program does not end at the close of the day at the state capitol. Each participating teacher and the four students who accompanied him or her to the forum will bring some of the day's deliberation back to their classrooms. This is accomplished through a post-forum lesson on the Four Futures that culminates in the entire class completing the Student Ballot on America's Future. Finally, all students in participating classes will write their own "Future 5" in the form of a letter to their legislator or the editorial page of the newspaper.

Post-Forum Lesson Plan & Ballots

The post-forum lesson is included in the Curriculum Resource Book. Its goals and outlines will be presented to participating teachers by the lead teacher at the pre-forum planning meeting.

At the completion of the post-forum lesson, each teacher will have their students complete ballots on-line using the Choices website. (www.Choices.edu) Choices will analyze the ballot data and develop the Capitol Forum Ballot Report, which you will disseminate to all participating teachers and schools throughout your state, to the media and to policymakers — local, state, and national. Ballot data and a state breakdown will also be posted to the Capitol Forum web site.

It is imperative that the on-line balloting be completed as soon as possible so that the ballot report can be developed and sent to participating schools before the close of the school year. Many of your participating teachers will want to use the reports in follow-up lessons or class activities. At the very least, they will want students to have an opportunity to review the report and compare their own views to those of students at large.

Goals of the Post-Forum Activities

The Capitol Forum is a program that engages all of the students in a class — not just those who attend the forum. The post-forum lesson and the balloting activity that is a part of it are designed to give all students an opportunity to wrestle with the issue of our country's future in today's world and to have their voices heard by their elected representatives. It is also an opportunity for those who attended the forum to take a leadership role with their classes. These activities are best if done within the first week after the forum.

Ballots are to be completed two weeks after the forum. This date should be included in your application, acceptance form, and other materials. The importance of this deadline should be emphasized at the Pre-Forum meeting and at the forum. Your lead teacher should also emphasize its importance to all—student and teachers—at the close of the day. This deadline is set to allow teachers two weeks following the forum to complete the lesson plan.

Writing the Future 5

As part of the post-forum lesson, all students are asked to draft a paragraph describing their "Future 5"—an explanation of their own views on what role the United States should be taking in world affairs. Teachers should ask students to expand upon this by writing a formal essay or a letter to an elected official or a letter to the editor of a paper. The teacher should send a sampling of the students' "Future 5" to the state organizer to forward to the Choices office to be posted to the Capitol Forum website.

Disseminating the Ballot Report

Following the spring Capitol Forum, the Choices Program national office analyzes the ballot data, writes, and publishes a report. Each state organizer will receive copies of this report for in-state distribution.

The Capitol Forum Ballot Report has many uses. First, participating teachers will use the report in follow-up classroom exercises. Second, each state organizer will want to share the report with his or her state's elected officials. Take the opportunity to call attention to the results of the ballot and to put the Capitol Forum in a broader context of civic participation efforts nationwide and within your state. Invite these office holders to become involved in next year's forum.

Finally, the report can serve as outreach and recruitment to additional schools in the state. Send a copy to the principals of high schools statewide. Provide suggestions for how the report might be used in classes or with student organizations that might have an interest in international issues and civic participation (Model U.N., Amnesty International, debate societies, etc.). This mailing to principals should also announce the dates of the next year's Capitol Forum program and invite applications from that school's teachers.

Completing Ballots and Evaluations on Time

The Capitol Forum is not over when the students go home from the capitol. Completing ballots and teacher evaluations is critical to the success of the program. In Illinois, teachers do not receive certification of their participation (for professional development credit) until they have finished their ballots and evaluations have been returned.

State organizers will also find the Capitol Forum Ballot Report will be of interest to co-sponsors, board members, state education officials, etc. The printed report will also be useful in explaining and promoting the program to your next group of teachers, speakers, panelists, and partners.

Post-Forum Media Relations

Another important audience for the Capitol Forum Ballot Report is the news media. We will work with the Brown University News Bureau to send out a national media release about the ballot report. As state organizer, you will want to distribute a media release

Ballot Troubleshooting

Be forewarned, when it comes time to do student ballots, there may be problems! Some teachers are uncomfortable using the website or become caught up in end of school activities. We suggest the following email reminders to teachers after the forum:

- The Capitol Forum Coordinator is available to support teachers in using the website.
- Teachers may assume that they are being helpful by counting up ballots and posting a single ballot from their class. Don't do that! This data is useless to the ballot report, which analyses and cross tabulates many individual ballot records.
- If a teacher has difficulty providing computer access for students, please contact the Coordinator of Capitol Forum.
- The timeliness of completing the ballot ensures the state ballot summary report and the national ballot report will be available prior to the end of the school year.

of your own to state and local news outlets. This release should include a list of participating schools as well as information about next year's Capitol Forum. Photos from your program and/or quotes from students who participated will help localize the story for editors.

A trip to the state capitol is still big news in many communities. Send Capitol Forum photos to the appropriate local newspapers. Encourage teachers to contact local reporters and invite them to observe the post-forum lessons or to listen to students discuss the ballot report. Teachers should also incorporate a letter-writing exercise in their post-forum plans that could have students writing letters to the editor or opinion pieces as the final piece for the students for the year.

Launching the Next Capitol Forum

Planning and promotion of the Capitol Forum should begin in the spring, or even earlier. You will be putting pieces of the program in place for the next year even before the current Capitol Forum has been held.

You may begin by reassessing elements of

your program with this year's experience in mind. Are there areas of your state or demographic groups that need more attention? Would a new co-sponsor be helpful in reaching those communities? Have new funding sources come to your attention? Do your current teachers know of events and publications that would help in recruiting new teachers? What changes, if any, would you make to facilities or program dates?

Aim to have your next teacher outreach brochure in circulation at least six weeks prior to the close of school in your state. In the best of all worlds, you would have next year's brochure in print and available to teachers, guests, sponsors, and the media at this year's Capitol Forum. (Refer to the online resource section for a template to use to develop your brochure.) This will force you to make some decisions well before you can make a thorough assessment of this year's events. The Capitol Forum Coordinator can help by sharing the combined experience of all of the Capitol Forum state organizers, as well as our staff's best judgment on running the program.

Finally, take advantage of the current Capitol Forum events as a means of further engaging potential sponsors or funders and introducing the programs to others you hope to involve in the coming year.