

# Getting Started

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As you take the first steps to launch your Capitol Forum you will need to find in-state partners, establish programming dates, identify a lead teacher, and get the word out to teachers statewide in order to recruit them for the program. This section of the guide includes information on each of these topics. The Organizer's Planning Calendar below is provided as a thumbnail sketch of the year ahead.

## State Organizer's Planning Calendar

### Spring (February-March)—Preliminary Planning

- Establish key dates and sign-up co-sponsors.
- Reserve spaces in the State Capitol for two teacher workshops and the Capitol Forum.

### Spring—Identify Lead Teacher

- The lead teacher should be someone who is familiar with the Choices curriculum and is experienced at integrating it into the classroom.

### Spring—Outreach Brochure

Choices provides a brochure template on the Capitol Forum page of the website under "organizing resources" for you to use to add your specific dates and other state-specific organizational information.

### Spring-Summer (April-August)—Outreach to Teachers

- April Teacher mailing—Outreach Brochure
- Spring-Summer Principals mailing—Brochure(s) and Application Ballot report (optional)
- Spring-Summer Media releases, Newsletter notices

### Announcements/Presentations at appropriate meetings

- Spring-Summer One-on-one contact

### Summer-Early Fall—Teacher Selection Committee Meetings

- Meet just after your first application deadline (about four weeks prior to the opening of the school year) to review all applications received to date. Begin acceptance process. Implement additional recruiting efforts if necessary.
- Meet just after final application deadline to review remaining applications  
Complete acceptance process.

### Summer-Early Fall—Preparation for Introductory Workshop

- Prepare agenda for introductory workshop.
- Confirm meeting space. Make arrangements for furnishings, equipment, and supplies.
- Make food and hospitality arrangements.
- Confirm logistics with teachers by mail (3 weeks before workshop).
- Assemble meeting materials.
- Issue press release.

### Fall—Introductory Teacher Workshop (led by Lead Teacher & State Organizer)

- After the introductory workshop you'll receive and distribute the curriculum units the teachers have ordered from Choices.

### Late Fall-Early Winter—Preparation for Pre-Forum Planning Meeting

- Arrange for global issues speakers.
- Confirm meeting space and make arrangements for furnishings, equipment, and supplies.
- Make food and hospitality arrangements.

- Confirm logistics with teachers by mail (3 weeks before meeting).
- Assemble meeting materials.
- Issue press release.

### **Winter—Pre-Forum Meeting (led by Lead Teacher & State Organizer)**

#### **Winter-Early Spring—Planning the Capitol Forum**

- Line up panel of elected & public officials for Forum dialogue.
- Select and prepare Breakout Leaders (participating teachers—typically selected at pre-Forum meeting)—Lead Teacher.
- Contact all participating teachers to check in on preparation—Lead Teacher
- Confirm logistics with teachers by mail (3 weeks before meeting).
- Book/confirm meeting spaces for forum activities.
- Make food and hospitality arrangements for forum.
- Prepare student, teacher, breakout leader, & guest forum packets from materials provided.
- Issue press release.

### **March/April—Capitol Forum (led by the Lead Teacher, Sec. of State & State Organizer)**

#### **April—Student Ballots Due**

Follow up with teachers to complete on-line ballots.

#### **May—Dissemination of Ballot Report**

- Send Ballot Report to elected officials, participating teachers, and local media.
- Send Ballot Report and application materials (for next year) to all school principals.

### **June--Capitol Forum Summer Institute at Brown**

## **Building Partnerships**

The Capitol Forum is typically organized as a partnership among a statewide organization whose mission supports civic participation and youth development, the office of the Secretary of the State or another governmental agency charged with voter education, a state Department of Education, a designated teacher who can serve as a leader for participating teachers and as a central figure for students on the day of the forum, and the national Choices office at Brown University.

**State Organizer:** The strength and long-term success of the Capitol Forum depends in large part on the commitment of a sponsoring organization in the state capable of providing the infrastructure required to administer and sustain the in-state program. This organization (and its designated staff) is the primary organizer of the program in the state.

**Government Sponsor:** As a state's constitutional officer in charge of voter registration and education, the Secretary of the State provides critical governmental access and authenticity to the program. It is expected that the office of the Secretary of the State will be actively involved in promoting the program statewide and making connections with elected and public officials, and will take a leadership role in making arrangements at the State Capitol.

**Lead Teacher:** The Capitol Forum is not possible without the leadership of a classroom teacher who is experienced in using the Choices Program materials and who appreciates the underlying goals of Choices: to engage young people in civic dialogue around contested international issues. The lead teacher will be trained to lead the preparatory workshops and to play a moderator's role at the forum itself.

**National Office:** The Choices Program coordinates the program at the national level and provides content and organizational materials for the program. The Coordinator for the Capitol Forum will be the liaison to the national office and available to support and assist the organizers.

## Identifying Co-Sponsors

Co-sponsors can help in a variety of ways. They can lend increased credibility to your program; provide connections to teachers, media, speakers, elected officials, or funding sources; and share the work load. Think about what kinds of assistance you will need and then identify potential co-sponsors who can help. Potential co-sponsors include:

- State Council for the Social Studies
- State Department of Education
- State Humanities Council
- International Studies Center at a university
- League of Women Voters
- World Affairs Council
- Statewide Media Organizations
- Community and/or Educational Foundations

Line up your co-sponsors early in the planning process so they can be listed on your promotional brochure and mentioned in your early media releases. Your co-sponsors will also need time to alert their own boards and membership to their participation in the program. An early partnership ensures that you won't miss promotional opportunities such as the annual board retreat or quarterly newsletter.

### Getting help from your co-sponsors

Your co-sponsors can help in a variety of ways. Think creatively.

In Illinois, the Secretary of the State's office approached the Illinois Education Association for in-kind support. The Association paid for the lunches for everyone at the Capitol Forum.

In Nebraska, the Department of Education posts information on the Capitol Forum on its website and maintains a link to the Nebraska information on the Capitol Forum site.

## Identifying and Preparing the Lead Teacher

The lead teacher is a high school social studies teacher who will participate as a member of the planning team throughout the year, lead the fall teacher workshop and the winter pre-forum planning meeting, and play the central leadership role with students at the Capitol Forum. This person should already be experienced with using the Choices materials and approach in his or her own classroom. In addition, this person should be committed to the idea that teaching the skills and habits of civic participation is one of the responsibilities of educators today. It is recommended that the lead teacher attend a Capitol Forum meeting in a nearby state as part of their training.

The lead teacher is identified and hired by the state organizer. The national Choices office can assist in identifying candidates if needed.

## Establishing the Calendar

There are five key dates to be established in your program calendar.

- Application Deadline
- Fall Workshop
- Winter Pre Forum Planning Meeting
- Capitol Forum
- Deadline for completed ballots

These dates need to be established early. The first four dates will be printed in your teacher outreach brochure. All five dates will be printed on your application form. There are several considerations that go into date selection.

**Application Deadlines:** Your recruiting process for the next program year will begin in the early spring. (In fact, if this is your second year with the program, your planning will begin even before this year's forum has ended.) You need to begin outreach to teachers when their planning for the following school year is underway and before the year-end crunch saps everyone's attention. (Conversely, you

### Schedule of Commitments of Lead Teacher

- Participate on teacher selection committee: two meetings: August & September
- Lead introductory teacher workshop: Fall
- Contact participating teachers periodically during the fall, and prior to the winter planning meeting: Fall & January/February
- Lead pre-forum planning meeting for teachers: Winter
- Select (with organizers) and prepare participating teachers to be facilitators for Forum break-out sessions.
- Consult with organizers and Secretary of the State's staff on selection of panelists for Capitol Forum
- Contact participating teachers prior to the Forum: February/March
- Lead Capitol Forum: March/April
- Be available to participating teachers by phone or email during classroom follow-up lesson and balloting
- Attend Capitol Forum Summer Institute at Brown University: late June

may also find that many teachers do not know what they are teaching before school closes for the summer.) Summer vacation makes it even more difficult to reach teachers and administrators.

As the program organizer, you need to monitor the pace of applications throughout this period. If applications, and/or requests for applications are slow, you will want to re-double your recruitment efforts. It is for these reasons that we recommend that you set an application deadline a few weeks after school opens in the fall but announce in your literature that you will be reviewing applications on a rolling basis beginning about one month before. NOTE: Set the final application deadline early enough in the fall to be able to make final decisions, notify teachers, and leave time for them to set up classroom substitutes and prepare for the fall workshop.

**Introductory Workshop (Fall):** The introductory workshop should be scheduled early enough in the school year to allow plenty of time for participating teachers to incorporate curriculum and approach from the workshop into their course(s) prior to the winter pre-forum planning meeting. Because the first month of school is usually dedicated to getting

the academic year started and few teachers are ready to leave their classes for a day, we recommend that the workshop be held in the second month of the term. Alternatively, it could be held before the school year begins, although this will require earlier recruitment. Some may want to consider Saturday.

#### **Pre-Forum Planning Meeting (Winter):**

The pre-forum planning meeting should take place at the State Capitol building approximately six weeks prior to the Capitol Forum. You will have school vacation schedules to balance when setting this date. In most regions of the country you also have snow considerations. You may want to establish a snow-date for this meeting.

**Capitol Forum (Spring):** The Capitol Forum typically takes place in late March/early April. There are lots of considerations in setting this date — school vacation schedules, religious holidays, legislative calendar (availability of office holders and rooms at the state capitol). You also need to be careful not to schedule the forum too close to the end of the school year. Teachers will need time after the forum to complete post-Forum lessons and the online ballots.

**Deadline for Ballots:** Students return from the Capitol Forum to lead their fellow classmates through a two-day lesson plan that culminates in the completion of a ballot. Ballots are completed on-line and are analyzed by the Choices Program staff, who develop a state report that will be published on-line and also a national report. The printed national report is sent to the state organizers in all participating states who in turn send them out to all participating teachers to use with their classes. State organizers also disseminate ballot reports to all state high schools, area media, and elected officials. Because there is one ballot report that includes data from all participating states, the Choices Program office needs to impose its own deadline that is two weeks after the forum in order to give teachers some flexibility while encouraging that the lesson is done promptly.

## Facilities

The Capitol Forum uses the buildings and resources of each state's capitol to help set the tone for the program. Students and teachers alike seem to appreciate the opportunity to be in the center of the state's government. The decor and traditions of the rooms you will meet in lend a sense of authenticity and seriousness to the occasion. Your access to public officials and other speakers and resource people will be enhanced by holding your Capitol Forum events in your capitol. Additionally, your state's news media is likely to be a stronger presence when the program is offered at the capitol.

It is expected that the office of the Secretary of the State will play a lead role in securing the facilities and rooms needed for the forum. The state legislative calendar will dictate when and if you can use official chambers for the Capitol Forum. Generally speaking, the spaces you wish to use will be in high demand, so you need to reserve space early.

**Teacher Workshop & Planning Meeting:** Ideally, your teacher workshop and your pre-forum planning meeting should be held within your state capitol complex. This al-



Salt Lake City, Utah

lows participating teachers to get a sense of the forum setting and to take advantage of the resources—in terms of speakers and access to public officials—that your capitol city affords. Transportation and accommodations in capitol cities tend to be good as well.

In a large state you may choose to hold one of these sessions in a different city so as to not unduly inconvenience those who live farthest away. If this is the case, choose the Introductory Workshop (fall) for an out-of-town location. Your pre-forum planning meeting, which is focused more closely on the Capitol Forum and includes speakers from the policymaking community, needs to be held in the capitol area.

For both sessions, you will need a meeting room that can accommodate roughly 25-30 people—your 20 teachers, lead teacher, organizing staff, speakers, etc. The room should be set up with four to six tables where teachers can comfortably work in small groups. You will need to serve lunch in this meeting room or make arrangements elsewhere. You will have other audiovisual and furnishing considerations. We provide a Facilities Planning Grid in the in the online organizing resources.

**Capitol Forum:** For the Capitol Forum day, you will need a large meeting room to accommodate roughly 125 people—20 teachers, 80 students, organizing staff, speaker, guests, media. You also need four or five smaller rooms for use during the two breakout sessions and a fifth room for a meeting of the students

who will play the role of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during the hearing on the Four Futures.

One of the benefits of holding the forum at your statehouse is the opportunity for students to hold their deliberations in the historic and august setting where their legislators meet. The meeting room, which will be needed throughout the day, can be a legislative chamber or a large hearing room. You will need to display posters in this room and set up a dais area for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the panel of policymakers and officials. Again, you will have other audiovisual and furnishing considerations.

The breakout rooms should be somewhat less formal. Students will need to pull chairs around to meet in small groups and may even spread out on the floor to make notes, etc. In addition to these important spaces, you will need to scout out locations for lunch, registration, photos, etc.



Springfield Illinois

Michael Shea

## Putting it all Together: The Outreach Brochure

The national office of the Choices Program provides a template for your state's brochure. In addition to the dates outlined above, you will want to display on your brochure the full institutional names of sponsors and co-sponsors and any funding sources. You may also want to include a welcome letter co-signed by your Secretary of State (or alternative governmental sponsoring agency) and the head of your organization, a non-profit mailing indicia (if desired), and organizational logo. Veteran states may want to include a photo and student quotes from a previous year.