



Oxfam America House Party guide: Tools for hosting a high-impact event

Introduction

Dear friends,

Oxfam America is an international relief and development organization that creates lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Together with individuals and local groups in more than 120 countries, Oxfam saves lives, helps people overcome poverty, and fights for social justice.

You can help us get the word out by planning an Oxfam America House Party. A house party is a fun, informal gathering where you get your friends and family together to take action like writing a letter or making a phone call to your legislator, having a film screening and discussion, building a support network, or educating others on important issues. Use your house party to teach your guests about why the US must act now to address oil, gas, and mining; the global food crisis; and other humanitarian emergencies.

Hosting a house party can be a powerful experience. You'll get to work with others committed to social justice. And you'll make an important contribution by raising awareness about important issues that affect poor communities.

In this guide, we've included everything you'll need to plan a successful house party. But if you have more questions—or just want some advice—contact us at **outreach@oxfamamerica.org**. We're eager to help.

Good luck! We look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Delaney", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Nancy Delaney
Outreach Manager, Oxfam America

Oxfam America House Party tips:

Seven easy steps for throwing a successful house party

1. Plan, plan, plan.

Decide if the party will be private or public. You can have a private party. Or use Oxfam's Community Events Calendar at <http://calendar.oxfamamerica.org> to invite people you've never met who support the cause.

Figure out where you'll host the party—and how many people to invite. How many people can you seat comfortably in your house, dorm, or apartment? Can you book a community center, classroom, or space at your place of worship or office? We recommend 10 to 15 people per Oxfam America House Party. Remember to invite more because not everyone will be able to make it.

Make a guest list. Include family, friends, coworkers, and people from organizations you belong to, such as your local place of worship.

Set a date. Pick what day of the week you want to hold your party. If you're inviting people from your church, for example, you can time it around your weekly services.

Pick a time. When will most people be able to attend? We recommend after 5 p.m. on weeknights or during the late afternoon on weekends. Weeknights often work best because people will be in town, and you can remind them during the day if you see them.

2. Do your homework.

Decide which topic you want to focus on. You may want to consider one of the following: oil, gas, and mining; the global food crisis; or some other humanitarian emergencies such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Register your event and order free materials. Once you decide to host a party, let us know. Send an email to outreach@oxfamamerica.org. You'll need to tell us your name, address, and roughly how many people you think will be attending. When we get that information, we'll send you some free Oxfam materials to use at your party. You should allow about three weeks for delivery of the materials.

Determine the goal for your party. Do you want to start off slow by introducing the issue and educating your guests about it? If so, will you show a movie or bring in a speaker? Or would you rather educate your guests and then generate letters or phone calls to legislators? Depending on your decision, you will have different homework to do before your party.

For a party that's purely educational, if you're going to use a speaker, invite one from your school, place of worship, or another organization you belong to who can speak about your topic for 15 minutes. He or she might have firsthand knowledge of the issue because of his or her own work, travel, study, or volunteer work.

If you want to use a DVD instead, look for a movie that's about 15 minutes long. You can show a clip from a film or documentary that you own or rent. Or you can write to Oxfam (see step 5) for a list of our current DVDs, which give an overview of Oxfam's work, describe a unique approach to community finance, or explain the crisis that is occurring in the Congo, among other topics.

For a party that will generate letters or calls to legislators, it's really helpful to have the names, phone numbers, and local addresses of your US senators and representatives handy. You can get that information at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. Search for your legislators to find their individual web sites. Go to the "contact" tab on their sites to find the district office addresses.

Read up on the issue. Go to www.oxfamamerica.org, and go through the materials you receive (see step 5).

3. Get your invitations out.

Send guests invitations. Develop your guest list, and send your invitations! You can create your own paper invitations or send online invitations through www.evite.com. Be creative and show that fun and activism do mix. Be sure you're clear about the purpose of the event in the title. When you write your invitation, we suggest that you set the party duration between one and a half to two hours.

Follow up directly. By maintaining personal contact, you can make sure your friends and family read your invitation and reply.

4. Prepare your "house."

Make sure there's enough seating. You don't want people sitting on the floor.

Make sure there are enough tables. You'll need them for food, materials, and writing.

On the day of the party, make sure the house is visibly marked. This is especially important if you live in an apartment complex.

If you're showing a movie, make sure your DVD player is working. Oxfam has several DVDs that might match up with your party theme.

Select food that's easy to eat. You don't want messy food to get in the way of the task at hand. Don't forget the drinks.

5. Gather your materials.

Within three weeks after letting us know you want to have an Oxfam America House Party, you'll receive a packet of materials from Oxfam. Depending on your topic, these could include a DVD; handouts for your guests; sign-up sheets; fun items like posters, banners, and stickers; and information you can use to guide your house party discussion.

Review your RSVP list. Make sure you have enough copies of the materials you'll need, especially if you plan on having your guests write letters. Don't force people to share.

If you plan on writing letters, provide pens, paper, stamps, and envelopes. Don't expect your guests to bring them.

Make nametags. Some guests might not know each other.

6. Party, party, party—Follow the agenda.

Give yourself at least one and a half to two hours to conduct your Oxfam America House Party.

Guests arrive (all)—15 minutes. Have your guests add their names to your sign-up sheet, put on nametags, get food, and mingle.

Welcome (host)—five minutes. Introduce yourself, welcome your guests, and thank everyone for working to create lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. See the sample welcome below.

“Thank you all for being here and taking time out of your day to learn more about [insert issue here].”

Insert three talking points here on the house party issue. You want to paint a picture about how poor people are affected. And remember to use powerful statistics or a story from our web site to drive home the point.

“We have an extraordinary opportunity this year to make a real difference. Let's make our voices heard.”

Guest introductions (all)—five minutes. Ask guests to introduce themselves quickly and share where they are from and why they came.

If a movie's on the agenda, watch the DVD (all)—15 minutes. Watch the DVD, which you purchased, rented, or received from Oxfam after registering.

If you have a speaker, give him or her the floor to speak (speaker)—15 minutes.

Discussion (all)—25 minutes. Lead a brief talk about the issue. Use the materials sent to you to help guide and inform your discussion. Use facts and talking points from the fact sheets you received, and talk about what you can do to make a difference, whether you choose to take legislative action or use this opportunity to organize local actions.

Optional group activity (all)—20 minutes. After the group discussion, you may choose to do an additional activity. This will depend on how engaged your guests are, if there is appropriate legislation pending in Congress, and your own comfort level with the issues.

✦ **If you're writing letters, hand out pens, paper, envelopes, and other materials.** Distribute the tools from Oxfam. As the house party host, you should create a sample letter to use for your letter-writing activity. If you are having trouble writing a sample letter, include a request for a sample in your initial email to outreach@oxfamamerica.org. Make copies available so that your guests can model their own after yours. But remember, the more personal the letter, the better. Make sure you have stamps on hand. Guests will use the materials you handed out to write their personalized letters to their members of Congress. Collect the letters so that you can mail them after the party.

❖ If you're making phone calls, hand out a phone script and numbers for your legislators, and ask guests to use their cell phones to make calls. Again, if you need help writing the phone script, just mention that in your email to Oxfam at outreach@oxfamamerica.org. Remember, you can only do this sort of activity during regular business hours when someone is available to answer your call at the legislative offices.

❖ If you are using this as an opportunity to plan local organizing efforts or to build a local group of supporters, brainstorm what you can do locally to make a difference. Can you educate a broader community? Plan an Oxfam America *Hunger Banquet* event? Host a fund raiser for Oxfam? Create a plan, establish what needs to be done and who will do it, and decide what the next steps are. Ask for individual commitments, and use this time to be creative and energized.

Wrap up (host)—five minutes. Thank all the guests for coming. Ask them to join you on Oxfam America's email list by signing up on the sheet provided by Oxfam. This list gives you up-to-date information on Oxfam's work around the world, as well as more tools to make a difference in your community.

7. Follow up.

If you wrote letters, mail them to Congress. Sort them into piles for each senator and representative, count each pile, and then mail them to the local addresses. If you haven't already done so, find local addresses at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov. Search for your legislators to find their individual web sites. Go to the "contact" tab on their sites to find the district office addresses. Note: It's important that you only mail to local district offices. Do not mail to the Washington, DC, offices because delivery will be delayed.

If you made phone calls, tabulate how many calls were made, to whom, and what responses you got. Send this information to Oxfam (address below).

Make sure you keep things moving. Follow up on the next steps that you established in the meeting, and make sure that people are doing what they've agreed to and that your plans are moving along. Keep people updated—it will help them feel more connected.

Tell Oxfam how things went. So we can improve how we do our work, we really want to know how the Oxfam America House Party strategy and tools worked for you. It's also essential that we track your impact, so let us know how many letters were written or phone calls were made and to which legislators. If you used your house party as an organizing meeting, tell us what future events you've planned. We'll send you a feedback form. Or you can email outreach@oxfamamerica.org and let us know how things went.

Send in the sign-up sheet (attached). Help us build an Oxfam supporter base. The sign-up sheet will allow your guests to opt into Oxfam's online community and receive periodic updates on our work around the world. Return your sign-up sheet to the following address:

Oxfam America
Celeste Bettencourt
226 Causeway Street, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02114-2206

Thank your guests via email. Remind them to join you on the Oxfam America email list at www.oxfamamerica.org/join.

Oxfam America House Party week-by-week checklist

Four weeks before

- Decide which topic you want to focus on.
- Determine the goal for your party.
- If you haven't yet, send an email to outreach@oxfamamerica.org to register your Oxfam America House Party and order free materials. You'll need to tell us your name, address, and roughly how many people you think will be attending. If you need a sample letter or phone script, please mention that in this email.
- Plan your date, time, and invitation list.
- Create and send invitations to your guests.
- Post your event to the Oxfam Community Events Calendar at <http://calendar.oxfamamerica.org>.

Two weeks before

- Follow up with your invited guests and make reminder phone calls.

One week before

- Read the materials from Oxfam and view the DVD (if you are showing one).
- If having a guest speaker, review what he or she will discuss.

Three days before

- Purchase supplies: buy food, drinks, and nametags. If writing letters, buy stationery, stamps, and pens as needed.
- Review the agenda for the event.
- If showing a film, make sure your TV and DVD player are working.
- Make extra copies of guest materials as needed.

The day of

- Set up your room with refreshments, literature, and letter-writing materials.
- Decorate your room with posters from Oxfam.
- To help people find your home, turn on the outside light and tie up a balloon.

During your Oxfam America House Party

- Greet guests and make sure everyone signs in on the sheet provided.
- Make sure all guests receive materials.
- Thank them for coming and participating.

The day after your house party

- If you wrote letters, sort, count, and mail your letters to Congress.
- Mail your sign-up sheet to Oxfam America, Celeste Bettencourt, 226 Causeway Street, 5th Floor, Boston, MA 02114-2206.
- Email Oxfam your letter and phone call tallies at outreach@oxfamamerica.org.
- Thank your guests via email, and—if they haven't already—ask them to join the Oxfam America email list at www.oxfamamerica.org/join.