

How to Set Up Effective Information Tables

I. Why Should You Use Information Tables?

Having information tables at events or in malls or on sidewalks is one good way to educate others about the issue you are addressing. Information tables are effective for the following reasons:

1. An information table provides a focus of attention that often draws people over on their own initiative, which is ideal.
2. An information table provides a handy space to display attention-grabbing materials that visually describe what your group is all about, such as: posters, project slogans, calendars, buttons, petitions, books, etc.
3. An information table provides a base from which you can move into the flow of passing people. The combination of "floating" and "stationary" tabling is especially effective.
4. An information table is a good place to orient a new member of your group to your issues, and have them practise talking to others about your issues.
5. When set up imaginatively and with flair, an information table reinforces your group's reputation as a credible, active organization.
6. An information table doesn't require excessive resources and is mobile.
7. Virtually anyone can learn how to be an effective public educator and one-on-one recruiter of new members through tabling.

II. How to Set Up an Effective Information Table

In order to have an effective information table, you should display key information but not overwhelm people because it can be confusing to people passing by. The following are key information material to have at your table:

- your group name clearly displayed (for example, with a banner in front of or hung behind the table);
- attention-grabbing materials that describe what your group is all about and why you have a table;
- signs that make it clear what you want people to do;
- information sheets, brochures, Action Alerts that people can take with them; and
- a sign-up sheet so people can easily give you their name, address and other contact information so you can get them involved or send them further information.

Other than these simple guidelines, what you do at a table is as important, if not more important, than the material you have on the table. The following are key things to do when you are at an information table:

- ensure you know the group and the issue and can answer questions about both;
- never hide behind the table -- don't wait for people to approach you; work the crowd; call out to people passing by about what you want them to do (for example, "Have you signed the petition yet?");
- smile, smile, smile;
- always identify yourself;
- address people politely, encouraging them to stop and find out about your issue without pushing them;
- avoid arguments -- some people will not agree with you no matter what, so don't waste your time arguing with them; spend your time talking to people who are open to supporting you; and
- if you are staffing the table with another person, 1 person can stay at the table with most of the information and sign-up sheet while the other person floats in front of the table handing out an information sheet, a brochures, or an Action Alert.