

Centering Marginalized Communities: A Framework for Intersectional Money in Politics Events

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In an effort to broaden and diversify the movement to get big money out of politics, [Free Speech For People](#) and [Demos](#) created this framework to ensure that community events on money in politics center voices that are marginalized by systems of oppression, including structural racism and white supremacy, heteronormativity, transphobia, misogyny, xenophobia, and ableism. These systems of oppression operate on a personal level, and on institutional and societal levels, to perpetuate and produce cumulative inequalities on the bases of race, sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, and whether or not one is able-bodied.

When we talk about centering marginalized communities, it's important to keep in mind that such communities are not homogenous. For instance, LGBTQ communities in Boston likely have different needs and priorities than LGBTQ communities in Los Angeles. It's also important to keep in mind that even within such communities, there are privileged and subordinated identities. For instance, white, cis folks carry privilege in LGBTQ communities; trans and non-binary people of color face compounded systems of oppression and inequalities. All money in politics events should elevate the most marginalized voices.

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of corporate rights are harmful to our democracy, using class and race analyses, and (3) space to discuss forward-thinking solutions to empower the community to act. This framework is based on, and comes out of, “Queer and Trans Concerns around Democracy, Money and Politics,” an event hosted in Boston on April 22, 2017 by Free Speech For People.¹

This document provides an overview of questions and tips to consider when planning similar events, including goals, logistics, panelists, co-sponsors, and the afterlife of the project. This document also contains a schedule of a sample event and links to educational materials produced by Allie Boldt (Demos) regarding the current state of money in politics, and educational materials produced by Jasmine Gomez (Free Speech For People) that tie in issues of money in politics to the specific community being centered—in this case the queer and trans community.

Intersectional money in politics events are important because (1) they will strengthen the money in politics movement by bringing in more people—including people with unique perspectives who are valuable and often unheard in our political system, and (2) they can broaden the conversation on money in politics beyond a discussion of campaign contributions and how much money is spent on campaigns, to a conversation about the concentration of wealth and power in our country, and how this intersects with other systems of oppression.

Before moving forward, it’s important to note that whenever a group gets together to organize around a marginalized community, members of that community should be in the organizing group. For example, Jasmine Gomez and Allie Boldt—who are queer women with close relationships with trans and non-binary folks—organized the Boston event with Mason Dunn and Jason Lydon, trans and queer activists in the Boston community. Everyone organizing the Boston event was part of the marginalized community they were trying to reach.

It’s also important to note that any money in politics event striving to center marginalized voices should also seek to create a democratic, non-hierarchical and racially equitable space for participants, including panelists and audience members. The event’s moderator can help facilitate this by encouraging “Step Up, Step Back” participation (step back from the conversation if you are

1 For more information about this event (including co-sponsors) and a video recording, see <https://freespeechforpeople.org/lgbtq-issues/>.

talking too much, step up if you have not talked a lot) during interactive portions of the event, by asking folks to state their gender pronouns when they introduce themselves, and by collectively establishing any ground rules or processes to make the space more equitable. The event's location and layout can also influence whether the space is welcoming, non-hierarchical, and racially equitable. If possible, hold the event at a location familiar to the audience you are trying to reach, and organize the room to be as open and non-hierarchical as possible.

Questions and Tips

Goals

Goals help frame the event and logistics surrounding the event. Think: what does the team want out of the event, and who does the team want to reach? Are you looking to reach and educate a new, diverse audience? Do you want to show the money in politics community how this issue relates to a population beyond a predominantly white middle/upper-middle class? What do you want to come out of the event (e.g. connections with new organizations, educational materials, etc.)?

Logistics

Whenever deciding a question about coordination and organization, ask whether the decision aids the goal(s) of the event. Below are some questions to consider when deciding on specifics.

- *Who:* Who are you trying to reach/who is the desired audience (e.g. a certain marginalized group, lobbyists, activists, everyday people, policy makers, lawyers, students, etc.)?
- *Where:* When figuring out where to host the event, think of whether the location will bring in an academic crowd (e.g. a university or institutional setting) or a community-based crowd (e.g. a local activist church, public library, YMCA, community center, coffee shop, etc.).
- *When:* Is there a date you want this on or around? Do you want this on the weekend or evenings, so that more working people can come, or do you want this during a weekday lunch, so primarily people doing work with money in politics will come?

Advertising: When advertising, again consider the crowd you are trying to reach. Millennials will often see Facebook events or other events hosted on online forums; families may find fliers in their neighborhood and schools; various nonprofits, membership

organizations, and churches or other places of worship may bring out specific community members, etc. Fliers are particularly helpful for getting the local community to show up to the event (especially people who are not otherwise connected to any of the co-sponsoring organizations). Make sure the flier includes a summary of what the event will discuss, names of the panelists/co-sponsoring organizations, when/where, and you can also include a [QR code generator](#) to link the flier to a Facebook event or webpage.

Advertising through listservs is also important. This is an area where having a unique and diverse set of co-sponsors for the event can be particularly helpful; each co-sponsoring organization can send information across listservs that will reach community members the original organization may have never reached before.

Payment: When working with grassroots activists, it is important to recognize that most of those activists work on an incredibly tight budget. Providing even a small stipend shows that the money in politics community values the time and perspective that grassroots activists provide to the movement, and it also allows activists to join who may otherwise not have the capacity to participate. Please provide stipends or donations to the grassroots organizations if possible.

[Art](#)

When working on the event, consider involving art that is related to the subject matter. Art makes events more engaging and can facilitate a deeper emotional connection to the issue, as well as a sense that participants are in a safe and non-hierarchical space. Art also makes events more unique and interesting, and can influence a person's decision to attend an event or not. Art can either be directly related to the issues brought forward by the event (namely money in politics or democracy more broadly), or the art can be tangentially related. For example, the event in Boston was slotted to have an artist perform poetry about issues related to the queer and trans community. This acted as an important community-building exercise that provided an emotional tie to the material. Art can be visual, performative, sculptural, video-based, musical, dance-based, a group activity, or even a game.

[Panelists and co-sponsors](#)

Having the right panelists may be the most important part of hosting an event that centers marginalized communities. The people brought on the panel to speak can make this event different from

most other events about money in politics. Instead of discussing only the theory and laws surrounding *Citizens United*, *Buckley v. Valeo*, issues around democracy, corporate rights, and money in politics generally, it is important to find panelists who can highlight the policy implications of these issues and tell personal stories connecting the money in politics movement to struggles that activists and others face when advocating for the targeted community. Tying in narratives of how money in politics impacts local community organizations makes the issue more personal, and allows people to connect in a way that theory and law alone do not.

When attempting to reach marginalized communities on a grassroots level, it is valuable and necessary to bring voices from within that community. The panel should likely consist of no more than two money in politics advocates and/or people working on democracy reform, and at least two grassroots organizations working on advocacy for the targeted community (at least for an intersectional event trying to reach grassroots activists and members of a marginalized community—the panel makeup can look different if the event is trying to reach lawyers, institutional players, etc.). The moderator should likely be a money in politics activist so they can quickly draw connections between what the grassroots activists say and the money in politics activists say.

The sponsoring organizations do not have to agree with the other panelists about what the panelists are advocating for (the actual policy suggestions); instead, they need to agree that political spending is unjustly influencing the conversation around issues of concern to the community, and the range of policy solutions that are possible. To promote a truly intersectional conversation, grassroots panelists and co-sponsors must be given room to voice their preferred policy solutions, even if another sponsoring organization may not agree with (or cannot take a stand on) all of those policy solutions. Intersectionality and coalition-building require room to voice separate concerns in addition to highlighting areas of agreement.

Finding the Right Panelists: To start, identify local concerns of the targeted community. For example, in Boston the queer and trans community cares deeply about (1) promoting trans rights on the state level, and (2) reducing high rates of incarceration for queer and trans people of color (and people of color generally). To understand the concerns of the queer and trans community in Boston, Jasmine attended local events hosted by prominent LGBTQ grassroots groups (not institutional players, but groups that were on the ground

advocating for the rights of queer and trans people), and she listened to the community. While this was additional effort, reaching a new community is not an easy task. It is also worthwhile for the strength of the movement. The more intersectional the money in politics movement becomes, the more people will be fighting for political equality and demanding democracy.

After identifying local concerns of the targeted community, communicate with grassroots organizations working in that community about joining forces for an event. Do some research to find out how money in politics is affecting the concerns of that community, and present the organization with questions and ideas connecting their work with the problems of big money in politics and the concentration of wealth and political power more broadly. Even if the initial grassroots organizations reached out to cannot participate, they will likely be able to suggest other grassroots organizations that do similar work, and may provide additional insights on how big money and powerful corporations are affecting their work and advocacy efforts.

For example, when Jasmine approached the Massachusetts Trans Political Coalition (one of the grassroots organizations on the Boston panel), she discussed how the donor class is cis-majority and asked how this impacts advocating for trans rights. When Jasmine approached Black and Pink (the other grassroots organization on the Boston panel), she asked how the wealthy private prison industry and prison guard unions had affected pro-incarceration policies, and how that harms queer and trans communities in Massachusetts. Jasmine connected the concerns of money in politics to concerns these grassroots organizations highlighted at their own events.

After finding the right panelists, and before the event, the moderator should try to set up a call with each of the panelists to go over the event and to get an understanding of what the panelist is going to say. This makes the event more predictable, and gives the moderator a chance to discuss the goals of the event and to think of follow-up questions and/or how to highlight the impacts of money in politics through a specific story.

Co-Sponsors: Having a broad list of co-sponsors for the event can help promote visibility to communities that normally do not interact with issues around money in politics. Co-sponsors can go well beyond participants of the panel, including legal groups, institutional players, other grassroots groups, money in politics groups, etc. Outreach about the event may provide valuable opportunities to educate these players about intersectionality and how money in politics affects marginalized communities.

Afterlife

When creating this event, think about goals for after the event finishes. Will there be any educational materials that come from this event? Will there be resources handed out to the community members? Should the event and information coming from the event be stored somewhere online (Facebook, website, etc.)? Are there new connections made that you want to continue fostering? Collect everything you can while at the event, in case you want to use this information later. If you survey people, collect their insights; take pictures and videos of the event; notice the questions asked during the Q&A session; etc. Collect any information that would aid in accomplishing any goals, including the names and contact information of the people in attendance.

Sample Schedule of a Community Panel on Money in Politics

This is a sample schedule based on the “Queer and Trans Concerns on Democracy, Money and Politics” event in Boston. Within the sample are links to educational materials that can be used for various events.

Personal introduction

Moderator introduces self and own organization, and describes what the event is about. Moderator can take some time at this point to say that each panelist will discuss various policy issues and the impacts of money in politics on those issues, but that does not necessarily mean that the organizations all agree on how to solve the issues. They do agree that money in politics is stunting a conversation on how to solve the issues.

The introduction phase of the event should strive to establish a welcoming, equitable, and non-hierarchical environment. This can include asking folks to introduce themselves with their gender pronouns, encouraging “Step Up, Step Back” participation, and establishing any other necessary ground rules or processes.

Introductions for others

Moderator introduces and thanks co-sponsors, or allows them to introduce themselves and say a little about their organization. The moderator can also give room for co-sponsors to say something at the end of the event, or allow them to provide materials about their organization.

Run-down of the event

If people in the audience have a roadmap of the event and what to expect, they are more likely to feel comfortable.

*Sample poll questions to understand the crowd's knowledge
[around 5-7 minutes]*

Starting the event with a quick poll will help the panelists understand the audience's comfort with the subject area. It also can provide data for how much was taught during the event itself.

- How much do you know about money in politics?
 - Not at all, a little, more than most, a lot
- How much do you know about corporate rights?
 - Not at all, a little, more than most, a lot
- What about *Citizens United* or *Hobby Lobby*? Have you ever heard of these cases?
 - Never heard of them, know the name and a little bit about them, know more than most, know a lot
- How much do you think these issues relate to the [queer and trans community—insert marginalized community that is being centered]?
 - 1-5 (not at all to all the time)

Art for community-building [5-10 minutes]

- Including some form of art can make the event more unique, personal, and gives the audience an opportunity to build community. This can include music, poetry, a performance, visual art, crafts, etc. The topic for the art can be on anything that may build community—whether that is money in politics, the marginalized community being centered, or the policy concerns that will be discussed.

General breakdown of theory behind MIP, political equality, corporate rights [around 10 minutes]

- The moderator should set up the conversation to begin with a money in politics activist who can provide a brief overview of where we are today with money in politics, such as:
 - What it means to have money be considered speech, and to therefore have unlimited amounts of money in our elections;
 - Who the politicians listen to; whose policies are being represented, including the racial, gender and socio-economic make-up of the donor class;
 - How much time politicians and candidates spend fundraising, and who can run for election;

- Whether our democracy is demographically reflective of our population as whole, or a privileged minority.
- The MIP specialist may also want to highlight some concerns with corporate constitutional rights—what rights they have claimed and how that may affect the marginalized community.
- Visit [Queer + Trans Concerns Around Democracy, Money & Politics - Free Speech For People](https://freespeechforpeople.org/lgbtq-issues/) (<https://freespeechforpeople.org/lgbtq-issues/>); under “Educational Materials” there are materials created by Jasmine Gomez (Free Speech For People) and Allie Boldt (Demos). These materials can be used for most events discussing the current state of money in politics.

Real-life examples of how money in politics impacts [queer and trans people—insert marginalized community that is being centered] [around 20-25 minutes]

- This is where the grassroots activists can provide personal narrative to highlight personal and policy implications of money in politics. After discussing some basics about money in politics, the moderator should provide context to switch panelists. Indicate that after learning about the theory and impacts via studies, this is the opportunity to see what that impact is on the ground.
- In Boston, the moderator asked several open-ended questions at once and gave each panelist 5 to 7 minutes to give the responses and some stories. If any question was not answered, the moderator can ask it as a follow-up question.
- **Sample Questions Asked during Boston Event:** In what ways have you seen money in politics impact the queer and trans community? Have you seen any trans advocacy harmed by MIP? Does this seem to be an issue that affects both political parties? Can you share a story with us showing how pro-incarceration policies have harmed the queer and trans community?
- After each panelist, the moderator should attempt to circle back and connect any important information said by the panelist to the theory, studies, and facts discussed before by the money in politics activist when possible.

How is this happening: legal theory [5-10 minutes]

Toward the end of the event it is important to ask the audience why this is happening. By this point, people are more likely to be emotionally invested in the material and already have a baseline understanding of the issues surrounding money in politics. Below are brief summaries of some of the main Supreme Court cases regarding money in politics and corporate rights. It is important to let the audience know that the only way to overturn a Supreme Court decision is through the Supreme Court changing its own mind, or through a constitutional amendment. This sets up the conversation to provide solutions right after discussing legal theories.

- *Buckley v. Valeo*
 - Decision said (1) spending money is protected the same as engaging in free speech, and therefore rich people have a First Amendment right to spend unlimited amounts of money on elections; and (2) the **only** acceptable reason to regulate campaign finance is to prevent corruption or the appearance of corruption. The Court determined the government was **not** able to limit political money for promoting political equality (the idea that everyone has an equal say in politics).
- *Citizens United*
 - The *Citizens United* decision built off *Buckley* and said that (1) corporations have the same First Amendment right to “speech” that people have, and therefore (because spending money is protected), corporations are also able to spend unlimited amounts of money on elections; and (2) the only corruption we can regulate is quid pro quo corruption (literally giving money in exchange for a vote, or basically, bribery). The Court reiterated we have no ability to regulate to promote political equality. (While bribery is a problem, it pales in comparison to the problems of inequality in our country—be it economic inequality, racial inequality, political inequality, or other forms of inequalities and oppression.)
- *Hobby Lobby*
 - *Hobby Lobby* expanded on *Citizens United* and said that corporations not only have a First Amendment right to speech, but some small (“closely held”) corporations also have a First Amendment right to freedom of religion. That right allows them to circumvent and invalidate government regulations that corporations argue violate their rights to freedom of religion.

- Corporations are also claiming other constitutional rights, making it increasingly difficult for the federal government to regulate an entity that was created through state laws.

Solutions and Q&A [15-25 minutes]:

- Ask for solutions from panelists on how to ***promote political equality/democracy*** (this is intentionally vaguer than asking for solutions that target big money in politics specifically, as the broader framing gives the grassroots activists space to discuss their own solutions, and allows panelists to discuss broader democracy reforms such as restoring the right to vote to individuals who have been disenfranchised and other efforts to combat voter suppression).
- End with a Q&A session. Take note of the questions asked and see if they demonstrate a clear understanding of the issues.

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