

So you're throwing a Policy on the Rocks?! Congratulations – and thanks for being part of the network that's opening up dialogue across the country.

A POTR is basically a party with a speaker and a few other bells and whistles you can toss in. In the end, it'll be your event – but citizenJoe will be by your side to offer all the tools and guidance you need to pull it off.

That's what this “how to” is about.

If you're a seasoned event coordinator, feel free to glance through its pages and toss it aside. If, however, you're good for a little guidance, we'll spell it out every step of the way. You can also feel free to say heck with the guide, call Julia, and ask her to walk you through what you got to do.

Any which way, you'll end up throwing a great shindig – and have a blast doing it.

The Non-Negotiables

But before you do give this manual the heave ho, there are a few non-negotiables you need to know. In order for your event to call itself a “CitizenJoe Policy on the Rocks,” it's got to:

- Strive to be equally welcoming to guests of all political perspectives. To do that, POTRs must:
 - Follow the “be nice” rule – or a suitable equivalent and
 - Present either a balanced range of presenters (in one evening or in successive evenings) or bipartisan presenters who understand and appreciate diverse views on their topic.
- Be at least 50% party (we don't recommend more than 75%)
- Set aside at least 30 minutes for organized policy discussion (we don't recommend more than an hour)
- Take place in a bar – or other venue with a nightlife vibe (lounge, cool restaurant)

Recapping what cJ Central gives you

The sky's the limit - i.e. if we can do it, we will. Realistically speaking what cJ Central can offer you for sure is:

- As much **advice** and hand holding as you can handle
- An **online event management** system (not as fancy as Facebook, but not so shabby)
- **Reading materials** and cool “**factoid**” **sheets**
- Other ideas and templates for more **fun & games**: nametag templates, signs, mingling games, etc.
- Help identifying and **inviting a speaker**
- **Customized invites** (using designs in our stock file)
- Placing your party on **other online event listings**

Recapping what cJ needs you to do

You can do it all if you like, but what we really need you to take charge of is:

- Finding a venue
- Inviting guests

Okay, now on to the How To...

The HOW TO Formally Begins

To help you sift through this guide...

The really key stuff that we highly recommend you read will look like this

We suggest you read this stuff too, but it's not as important

This is for those who'll take as much guidance as they can get

Also, we'll add a **CJC** (citizenJoe central) whenever there's something we've got covered.

Step I – Get a “Host Committee”

Unless you're the epicenter of social life in your city, we strongly suggest you build a “host committee” (or “party committee/prom committee”) to help you pull this off.

A host committee can help you with all aspects of the event – planning, volunteering the night of – but what you really want a host committee to help you with is inviting guests.

We recommend at least 10 hosts, but 20 is even better. To be safe, figure every host equals about 3 total guests at the event – so 20 hosts means you'll have 60 people at your party.

Although you could get a host committee just to invite guests, committee members often like to feel like they're part of something (that is, *really* involved in making it happen), so it's a good idea to offer them the option of helping out – either just by helping you brainstorm venues/ideas/etc. or by helping to get things done.

First decide what you'd like your committee members to sign on for (we recommend they sign on for inviting all their cool friends to the event, with the option of coming to a planning meeting to help plan the event and help out in any way they'd like).

Next, start asking everyone you think would like to join. The pitch is easy: “Hey, I'm thinking of putting on this event called ‘Policy on the Rocks’ – it's something happening in a few other cities and the idea is to bring together young professional types to talk about policy issues in a real nonpartisan way and party at the same time. It should be tons of fun – a great way to meet other smart, interested people and also encourage multi-partisan dialogue, if that's something you're into. I'm putting together a ‘party committee’ and thought you'd be great because (mention why you think they'd be interested). The commitment is only to invite everyone you think would want to come and, if you want, you can also get more involved in helping to plan and pull together the event. Are you in?” Works like a charm.

Depending on how much you'd like the committee to be involved in deciding, set a planning meeting with them 4-12 weeks before the party. It takes about 3 months to comfortably plan a party (we did our first in 6 weeks and we felt a little frantic). If you want your committee involved in picking the topic, speaker and venue, meet with them three months in advance. If you want them to be involved in planning the fun and games, 4-6 weeks beforehand should be fine. You can also do two meetings - one 3 month meeting and a 6 week meeting. That's ideal –and what we suggest in our timeline at the end.

Step II – Pick a topic

cJc **CitizenJoe** has a number of suggested topics and “POTR Packets” you can choose from – we recommend you do so, so you don’t have to go recreating the wheel. If you choose a topic that’s not on the list, we’re happy to offer advice, but we won’t be able to create a packet for you – if that’s cool with you, it’s cool with us.

If you’re going with a “POTR Packet,” you’re ¾ of the way there, but you and your committee may want to define the topic with a question that you think will spark the best discussion with your crowd.

For example, a POTR on health care that asked “Should there be a guaranteed health care for all Americans who need it” wouldn’t spark much discussion in a left leaning crowd, but could be really engaging in a right leaning group. A better question for a more liberal guest roster might be “Should the market play any role in a national healthcare system?” (Of course, one of the goals of POTR is to get a balance of perspectives among your guests, but in Manhattan, try as we might, we never can get enough conservatives in the room. We figure, if you’re in Orange County, you might have equal trouble getting liberals.)

Step III – Choose a day of the week and a date

You know your crowd best – and what’s the best night of the week to get them out for a cocktail party, including when’s the best time to have your speaker(s) present.

Pick a date far enough in advance to get things organized, but keep it flexible until you lock in your speaker.

Step IV – Find a speaker

cJc **CJC** is delighted to help you identify and invite a speaker(s) for your event. We don’t have funds to pay for their appearance, but we find most are happy to come without pay (it’s not often they get invited to a hip party to talk about the topic they love). If a speaker has to travel, you may want to offer to reimburse them for their travel and/or hotel, which you can cover with your door charge.

As stated in the ‘Non-Negotiables’ above, you’ll need either two speakers who balance each other out or one speaker who can do a fair job of presenting both sides. If your crowd leans left or right, you can err on getting a speaker who tips the opposite way (that is, a slightly right leaning speaker for a lefty crowd, or a slightly left leaning speaker for a righty crowd).

Choosing the speaker may be the most important part of putting together a POTR. You don’t necessarily want someone famous – much more important is to have someone who is really smart, really knows their stuff and is a great talker (part of being a great talker, of course, is having a good sense of humor).

If you’re scouting out a speaker on your own, there are plenty of places to look – think tanks, universities, op-ed writers. We don’t recommend politicians or others in office, as they usually are careful about what they say – so you’re less likely to have a frank discussion. We do recommend strongly that you make sure your speaker is a good talker – either by seeing them speak yourself or going on someone else’s word. You might also find a clip of them talking on youtube or google video.

Once you've identified who you want, if you have a connection to them by all means use it to make an invitation. If you have no connection, don't worry – a friendly email explaining the event and why they'd be a perfect speaker usually will do the trick. Give a date, but also give them the flexibility to propose an alternate one – especially if you really like them. If you want a sample email we're happy to share.

We suggest getting your speaker before setting a date in stone and nailing down your venue – just 'cause a venue is usually easier to find.

Step V – Get your venue

In order to count as a POTR, your event should be in a venue that is a bar, lounge or other venue that has a night-life vibe.

To really work, your venue should:

- Have a space that holds 75-150 that you can use exclusively from 7-9pm (or until the policy talk is over). If it's a separate room in a larger venue, make sure the sound from the rest of the venue doesn't flow in.
- Be willing to let you do a cash bar with little to no guarantee and no room fee. "Cash bar" means you, the host, don't pay the venue for anything, but just let the bar collect all the business from the guests you bring. Some bars may want a "guarantee" which says, if your guests don't bring them a certain amount of business – say \$1,000, that you will cover the difference. Try to avoid this – at least for your first event – since you might overestimate how many guests will come and find yourself paying out of pocket at the end of the night. As for room fees, don't bother – you will find a venue that is happy to get your guests' business without a room fee.

If you have a choice of venues, some questions to help you make your choice:

- Is one willing to do a generous drink special? Either a discounted drink for your guests or, better yet, one free drink for every guest (we usually require our guests to accomplish a social-mingling-task before claiming their free drink – see "fun and games" below). Even better – do they know any distributors that are looking to promote their label and sponsor an open bar (in exchange for you splashing their name on your invites – which is cool with us). You can also see if they're open to you bringing in a liquor sponsor themselves.
- Does the venue's name have anything to do with the topic? This'll be harder to do in a small city (we even have trouble in NYC), but if you can find a venue that fits the theme of your event, all the better. We did our discussion on the rise of China in a hip restaurant called "China 1" and had our talk on gay marriage in a lounge called "Happy Ending." You get the idea.
- Does it have a mic? (for obvious reasons) And would you get use of the sound system? (if you want to bring your own soundtrack) Most will have both.

To set things up, just call up the venue (speaking to the owner or event coordinator) and tell them:

- About the event;
- How many people you're expecting*;
- The date you're looking at;
- How you'll need the space exclusively from 7-9pm (or until whenever the talk portion of the evening will end);
- That you're looking to do a cash bar

Not as crucial, but you may also want to mention;

- How you'd like to do some kind of drink special – either with a liquor sponsor or not**;
- That you may be setting up tables for theme-related activities (nothing illegal of course);
- That you may be charging \$5 or \$10 at the door.

Ask the venue if they're willing to do a cash bar. If they require a room fee, walk. If they ask for a guarantee, talk them down to a number you feel *really* comfortable with because at the end of the day, it may come out of your committee's pocket (doubtful, but you really have to be careful). If you're not comfortable with a guarantee, talk to another venue – we promise you'll find one.

*In negotiating with a venue, we recommend you be upbeat and excited about all the guests you think will come – but also be honest. Tell them it's your first event but that you have (so many) people on your committee so you think you'll get a minimum of (so many) guests, but possibly get (so many) more. Also tell them about the event – you'd be surprised how many bar owners are into the idea of open dialogue. It's better to have a venue turn you down because they can't afford the risk – than to have an owner ticked off at you because you promised 150 customers and brought 50.

**If this is a new business which is really looking for customers, you might find them to be really generous on the drink special front, but most will not be too eager to give away free liquor. A drink special may just be a discounted drink. They may be willing to do a free drink per guest, but probably not. If, however, you get a liquor sponsor, they may be much more open on the free drink idea. This is the way liquor sponsors work – the sponsor gives you free liquor and you give the sponsor glowing acknowledgment on your invites and any other materials it works to splash their logo on. You get to do whatever you want with the free liquor – we give it to the bar in exchange for them pouring a free drink for each guest. Finding a liquor sponsor is hard if you don't happen to know one – but ask around to all your friends, and you just might. Also ask the venue if there are any distributors who have asked to sponsor events.

By the way, under “fun and games” one of the things we suggest is doing a “drink game” to force your guests to mingle. This would require your guests to meet a “match” before they claim a free drink. If you don't have a liquor sponsor, but you want to do the mingling game anyway, you can simply offer to reimburse the bar for every “drink ticket” that is claimed – and pay for it out of the cover you charge at the door.

Step V – Plan how the night'll go – including fun and games

You can follow the exact format we use in NYC and use all the fun and games in our “party packet” – or you can mix up the night in a way that suits your crowd best.

The only must-dos to qualify as a Policy on the Rocks are:

- To keep the event at least 50% party/mingling time
- To have at least 30 minutes of the event dedicated to the ‘policy talk’ portion.

With all the planning, you'll also want to decide if, and how much, you'd like to charge at the door - \$5 or \$10 – to cover your costs.

This is a great way to involve your committee – and just have a lot of fun. For all the ‘party packets’ we have set to go, we will give you many tools, games and general ridiculousness to play around with – but don’t let our ideas limit you. Whether at your first or second committee meeting (if you have a second), we recommend you devote a good chunk of time to brainstorming ways to make the night fun. We also suggest you walk through the “flow” of the evening to get suggestions on how the night should go; you can start off with our party model or mix it up any way you think will work.

Party Flow Model:

7-8pm – Party Mode

- Welcome guests at door with email sign-up sheet, name tags and drink tickets (if you’re doing any). Take their money (if you’re asking for any).
- Guests mingle, play their social mingling game (if you’re doing one) sample whatever drink specials there are, eat whatever munchies you brought, do whatever activities you have in store.

7:55 – give your guests a 5 minute heads up to get a new drink before the policy talk

8pm – Policy Talk

- Welcome guests and give 30 second spiel on why they’re there – open dialogue, awareness, etc. Introduce speaker(s)
- Speaker(s) makes opening remarks (5-10 minutes each)
- Ask a couple questions yourself (if you want)
- Open up questions and comments to the floor. We recommend you set up two rules before doing so:
 - One: be nice
 - Two: try not to talk for more than one minute
- Wrap up in 45 minutes total (stretching out to an hour if there seems to be huge interest, but never going over an hour – your guests want to mingle!)

9pm – back to Party Mode

With your committee, go over a possible “party flow” and get as much feedback as they have (if they have none, that’s cool). What you’ll really want is their ideas on what party antics to do, including:

cJc Name tags: We don’t suggest you do plain old nametags, but something like giving everyone a nametag that says “Hi, my name is Joe” or doing special nametags related to your theme (we have suggestions in each of our party packets).

Specialty drink: Again, if one related to your topic comes up, use it. It can be obvious – we did martinis for our “Martini Navratilova” event – or ridiculous – we invented a “Green Hurricane” for our global warming discussion.

cJc Drink Game: No, not quarters. One brilliant way to force your guests to mingle is to make them work for a free drink. When guests come, they get drink ticket with instructions on it – usually some variety of they have to find their “matching ticket” in order to claim their free drink.

Munchies: Same deal. We served Ben & Jerry’s “Fossil Fuel” ice cream at the global warming event. Non-perishables like twinkies and cheez whiz were offered at our nuclear proliferation event.

Giveaways. Either when your guests come or leave – little things can make them feel special, like sunblock at a global warming event – or glow stick bracelets at a nuclear proliferation event.

cJc Other games and activities. This runs the gamut – Chinese massage at an event on China, a “love astrologist” at our gay marriage event, a “make your own nuke” (out of chocolate) at our nuclear proliferation event.

Soundtrack. If anyone has an ipod and a proclivity to create playlists, go to town with theme-related tunes (best pick – Flock of Seagull’s “I Ran” for nukes party.

Step VI – Send out your invites

cJc If you're doing a pre-fab Policy on the Rocks, **citizenJoe** is happy to individualize our invite for your event. You can choose to send invites via citizenJoe's online event management tool, by email or really however you like.

cJc We can also help you get your event posted on other event and social networking sites.

Send out a lot of invites – shoot for five invites for every guest you'd like to come. Of course, this is where your committee comes in handy.

We suggest sending out three invites –

- A "Save the Date" 6-8 weeks in advance
- The real invite 2-3 weeks in advance
- A reminder invite 2-3 days in advance

If you're using citizenJoe's online event management tool, it allows guests to RSVP and forward the invite to others and allows you to keep track of RSVPs

Step VII – Putting all the pieces together

Okay, you now have your speaker, venue, fun and games and invites out, now all you have to do is line up your volunteers for the night, put all the pieces together and look forward to the party.

Spelling that out in detail, some things you'll want to prep for and bring to the event are: (we're happy to prep the ones with **cJc** for you)

- cJc** • Signs – welcome, sign in, etc (we have ones you can use in our party packets)
- cJc** • Email list sign up sheets – for those who want to hear about future events
- cJc** • Nametags
- cJc** • Drink tickets
- cJc** • Money box and change
- cJc** • All your fun and games paraphernalia (that is, the ones that can be printed out and mailed)
 - Ipod and playlist
 - Munchies
 - Giveaways
- cJc** • Factoid sheets – for every POTR in our playbook, we've created "factoid sheets" that we print out and spread around the party. Believe it or not, people love these – they even pocket them at the end of the night.

As for volunteers, you may want to have

- 1 or 2 help-set-uppers
- 2 or 3 greeters from 7-8pm (greeting, taking money, asking for email addresses)
- 1 person to take care of your presenter(s) – if that's not you
- 1 person to moderate the discussion – if that's not you
- 1 or 2 greeters at the front door from 8-9pm and from 9-10pm

Step VIII – The main event

You got it all down. Now just have a great party - and bask in the glow of creating some real dialogue. You Rock!

All Together Now.

All seem a little overwhelming? Don't worry, it's not. Just so you can see how manageable it all is, we'll put it all into a timeline for you.

Suggested timeline – 12 - 16 weeks

(you can pull one together in less time, but we don't recommend it)

Time ahead	Basics	Incidentals
12-16 weeks	Schedule your first committee meeting and assemble your posse	
9-12 weeks	Have your first prom committee meeting!*	<i>Decide:</i> topic and angle, ideal date and time of event <i>Discuss:</i> possible venues, speakers, liquor sponsors and specialty drink (if any), cover for event <i>Divide and conquer:</i> line up volunteers to help you with hunt
6-12 weeks	Line up your: speaker, venue and liquor sponsor (if any)	CJC can help you with your speaker
4-7 weeks	Have your second prom committee meeting* (possibly at event venue)	<i>Decide:</i> nametags, munchies, giveaways, fun and games, flow of evening <i>Divide and conquer:</i> volunteers for putting together munchies, giveaways, fun and games and for working the event Let CJC know what we can print out and mail to you
6 – 8 weeks	Send out “Save the Date” invite	CJC can tailor invite for you – and post on online event sites
2 – 3 weeks	Send out official invite	
2 – 3 days	Send out reminder invite	

*A second prom committee meeting is not necessary, but a good idea – at least for your first go-around – so you can a) not overload one meeting and b) create a sense of camaraderie and c) build momentum and excitement for the event.