

How to talk to people about Convention of States

Suggestion 1: The Coffee Date

Time required: 15 minutes to an hour

Who: Friend, acquaintance, coworker, family member, or anyone you would like to catch up with

Setting: Casual

Today's suggestion is the coffee date. The coffee date is a really low key, informal way of meeting with someone, be it a friend, family member, co-worker, or acquaintance. Use this time to catch up with the other person.

Find out how they have been since you've seen them last. Learn what they do, and what they are interested in. Show a sincere, personal, friendly, interest in them. Then, go ahead and explain what you do.

Maybe tell them about your work, or your hobbies, or something interesting you did recently. This is when you can mention that you're a district captain for the Convention of States. Tell them what you do and why you do it. Tell them about Article V of the Constitution. Explain why you think that the Convention of States is something that any American citizen should be involved in. Everyone is disgruntled with the federal government. That means that no matter what someone's political leaning is, the idea of limiting the federal government and returning power to the states is likely to be very attractive.

Ask them if maybe they would be interested in helping out, and direct them to the COS website for more information or to sign up. If they are interested and from your area, add them to your team! If not, have them sign up on the action center and have them email me. I can put them in touch with the right leaders.

After that, if they're interested, feel free to talk about COS more, or just continue to have a friendly, relaxing conversation over coffee. This doesn't have to be a big, formal production, just a fun, casual chat with a friend. You really only need to spend around five minutes talking about COS, though you're certainly welcome to talk more at length.

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Suggestion 2: The Home Meeting

Time required: 1-3 hours (including prep)

Who: Friends, acquaintances, coworkers, family members, or anyone you would like to invite to your home for a casual presentation

Setting: Casual

Materials required: A home (or other inviting, casual meeting place); a means to show a youtube video to a large group; seating for all the guests; refreshments; and a computer or two for guests to use to sign up on the Action Center.

The home meeting is a strategy used by many different grassroots-style organizations. You may know it best through Tupperware or Avon home parties. This is ideal for a group of 5-20 people, depending on the size of your house. Plan refreshments, use a video presentation from our website, and have a computer ready for volunteers to sign up with.

Here's how to prep for it:

1. Make sure you've familiarized yourself with the documents on our Citizens Toolkit. You can find it on the right side of the page at conventionofstates.com. You will need to give a brief presentation and answer questions, so while you don't need to be an expert, you do need to understand the basic mechanism of the COS Project. It is ok to tell people you don't know the answer to their question, just write down the question and send it to me. I'll answer it, and you can follow up later with the answer.

For the presentation, you're free to craft your own presentation, but I have two strategies to suggest.

- A. (Recommended) A 10-20 minute personal presentation from you, making use of the COS powerpoint from the Citizens toolkit, and followed by the short video Alabama made outlining the actual process of calling for amendments through an article V convention. After the video, have a brief question and answer time. Video here: <http://conventionofstates.com/media/cos-project-alabama>
Make sure your presentation includes: your personal background with the COS Project, the overall goals of the COS Project, the reasons for calling for a Convention of States, the process of calling for a convention, and frequently asked questions. Finish your presentation with a few action steps, for example, "Call your legislators, tell all your friends, and volunteer to be part of my team!" Don't

forget to include contact information for your legislators and the COS leadership team, i.e. yourself and the State Director.

- B. The second strategy is to use the 23 minute video presentation our Coalitions Director, Laura Fennig recently made. Video here:

<http://conventionofstates.com/media/overview-cos-project-washington-freedom-summit>

The image quality is slightly lower than could be desired, and hopefully we will be crafting a better video soon, but her presentation is entertaining and clear.

Introduce the video briefly with a 2-5 minute personal presentation about your background with the COS Project and why you think it is important.

2. Make your home friendly and welcoming. Most of you know how this works, but here's a few points: have enough seats for everyone, keep the temperature near 72 degrees, make sure there is enough parking in front of your house, and make sure any areas of your house where guests will be walking are clean and well lit.

Provide refreshments such as chips and salsa, desserts, coffee, soda, or small trays of fruit and vegetables. This doesn't have to be complicated or difficult, and it adds a good finishing touch to your meeting. You want to encourage people to hang out and talk informally even after the presentation; refreshments and coffee are a great way to do this.

(Pro tip: If you have the knowledge and the time, baking your dessert or some bread right before the meeting fills your house with delicious, home-y smells and makes it very inviting.)

3. Finally, have one or two computers available for your guests to use. Make sure they're connected to the internet, and that the COS website is already loaded. They can read our website or volunteer on the Action Center. However, if you do this, you should be careful to supervise the computers when guests are using them.

That should cover the main points of prep for the home meeting. Here's a potential timeline your meeting could follow:

5 PM: Your house should be ready for guests to arrive. Some might arrive early.

5:30 PM: This is the scheduled start time. Be ready at the door, greeting guests with a smile. As they come in, you can let them mingle casually for a few minutes while you greet guests and wait for latecomers.

5:45 PM: Seat everyone and start the presentations.

6:05 PM: Release everyone to casually socialize and enjoy the refreshments. Pass through the entire group, greeting everyone personally and answering any questions they might have.

This is also when you can have them use the COS website and sign up on the Action Center.

7-9 PM: Depending on your schedule and the way the socializing time goes, the meeting can end whenever you like. If you need the meeting to be over by a certain time, make sure you communicate that casually to your guests at the beginning of the night.

That's all there is to the home meeting! Remember, this is an ideal tool for people who enjoy inviting others over to their homes and chatting casually. This can be really fun and laid back, and is also a good tool to introduce new volunteers to each other. Feel free to change and adjust this plan as you see fit!

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Suggestion 3: The Journalist part 1

Time required: 1-5 hours

Who: The general public

Setting: Professional but friendly

Materials required: A computer; a local newspaper or news website; and the [sample letter](#) at the end of this section.

The Journalist is a strategy that will enable you to gain the attention of a broad spectrum of people in your region. People who would not attend meetings or follow local political events still read the newspaper or local news websites; so this enables you to mass-communicate with people of every viewpoint. You can do this by writing a Letter to the Editor.

Part 1: How to write a letter to the editor:

- A. Begin by carefully sampling your local publications. Analyze the topics they cover (business, sports, local news, national news, politics, entertainment, etc.) Pick one that regularly publishes news or political information, and make sure it accepts letters to the editor. (Pro tip: If you can find an article that relates to your subject, respond to it saying why you agree or disagree. This makes your letter more relevant.)
- B. Read the letters to the editor in a recent issue of your selected paper. Notice how they're formatted, what kinds of topics they generally cover, and how they are worded. Also, the letters to the editor page usually has details on how to submit your own letter. Follow these meticulously; newspapers get flooded with letters and you don't want the editor to have any reason to not print your letter.
- C. The Process of Writing:
 - a. Brainstorm your subject. This should be something related to the Convention of States Project and also something that the newspaper editor would find relevant for his audience. (See point A above.) For example, you can write about the growth of your local team, or the increasing number of state legislators who support a COS, or about how the overreaching federal government is damaging your state or local region. Be creative, but remember to stay focused on the local elements of your subject.
 - b. Plan your letter. This should be a brief outline detailing the 1-2 main points you want to make. Remember, a letter to the editor should be around 150-300 words long. If it is significantly longer or shorter, the editor will not want to print it. When you construct your outline, use the following basic structure: *(Don't forget to check out the sample letter on the last page of this guide!)*
 - i. Simple introduction: "Dear Sir"
 - ii. Statement of the problem
 1. Use specific examples: quotes or statistics.

2. Remember that in order to succeed, the COS Project needs people from all political viewpoints, so be non-partisan.
 - iii. Statement of the solution
 1. You're building an argument, so remember to tie the solution directly to the problem.
 2. Briefly summarize the Convention of States Project.
 - iv. Brief call to action
 1. Call your state legislators
 2. Tell other people
 3. Learn more on our website <http://conventionofstates.com>
 - v. Simple closing
 1. Name
 2. Position with COS
 3. Phone number or email address (optional)
 4. <http://conventionofstates.com>
- c. Write your letter. Remember to use accurate spelling, proper punctuation, good capitalization, and clear, correct grammar. Keep your tone informal but professional; you want to come across as a well-balanced, knowledgeable, thinking citizen of the United States. Be as likeable as you can while still making a clear argument. Stay focused on one narrow topic, and don't be wordy. Remember: 300 words maximum.
- d. Proofread it. Use spell-check, then print out your letter and read it out loud. This will help you find poorly worded sentences or other errors. Get a friend to proofread it too. Then, put it away for a day or two and proofread it again with fresh eyes.
- D. Finally, send it in! Remember to exactly follow the instructions provided by the newspaper for submitting a letter to the editor. Most newspapers prefer emails because they are simpler to copy material from. If in doubt, call the newspaper office to clarify their rules.
- E. Wait for it to be printed. Don't be disappointed if the editor chooses not to run your letter, now that you have practice, you can write a new one later. However, if it does get printed, tell everyone you know, and don't forget to email it to me!

Letter

Joe Schmoe
1234 Hard Way
4 February 2014
(234) 567-8910
joeschmoe@superawesome.com

To:
The Editor
Sun Valley Herald
Kansas

Dear Sir,

As a citizen of the United States who loves the liberties provided by the Constitution, I am concerned by the power hungry attitudes in the federal government.

In 2013 we saw Republicans and Democrats in Congress bickering with each other over the budget, each side trying to save its pride and prestige. When they did finally pass legislation, their solution was a not a responsible answer to the problem, but a diplomatic way of saving face, increasing our national debt instead of budgeting responsibly.

Sadly, this sort of thing is not uncommon anymore. In his recent State of the Union address, President Obama expressed his willingness to bypass Congress if he thinks it is necessary. The reality is that regardless of political party, the members of the federal government are more concerned with their own political goals than the will of the people. Thus, they manipulate the Constitution, disregarding its limits on power, and overstep their boundaries, taking power from the citizens and the states.

In order to preserve the proper order, the Convention of States Project is working to convince state legislatures across the US to call for an amendments convention. This kind of a convention is authorized by the Constitution for exactly this situation: one where the federal government is out of control and unwilling to limit its own power.

We Americans are tired of our national government ignoring us. I encourage my fellow citizens to investigate <http://conventionofstates.com>, and to contact their legislators and friends, telling them why it is important!

Joe Schmoe
District Captain for the COS Project
(234) 567-8910 ****
<http://conventionofstates.com>

*****This is optional, but provides a way for people to follow up for more information.*

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Suggestion 4: The Rolodex Scheme

Time required: 15+ minutes

Who: Your personal contacts

Setting: Casual and friendly

Materials required: A simple list of friends and acquaintances

Social theorists claim that almost everyone on Earth is connected by an average of 6 degrees of separation. In other words, between you and almost anyone else there is an average of 5 people. For example, if Person A wants to talk to Person B using a chain of acquaintances, it would look like this (each arrow stands for one degree of separation):

Person A → acquaintance 1 → acquaintance 2 → acquaintance 3 → acquaintance 4 → acquaintance 5 → Person B.

This means that through your own personal network of contacts you have incredible power to contact anyone else with the COS message. However, your contact list has more potential than just targeting specific individuals. If you and your friends each know only 14 unique people, but spread your message to all 14 people in each of your contacts through five degrees of separation, it comes down to $14 \times 14 \times 14 \times 14 \times 14$ people, or $14^5 = 537,824$ people. Remember, our actual goal is 400,000 – so you will have reached almost 140,000 more than our target number of volunteers!

Additionally, if you tell 14 people, and those 14 people each tell 14 other unique people within your district (2 degrees of separation), you will have spread the COS message to 198 people. Even if only half of those people are interested enough to volunteer, you will have already built your district team to the target 100 people.

Now, obviously numbers are easy to multiply; people are harder. However, the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. In the same way, the way to build a strong grassroots team is to separate your target audience into manageably sized groups, and target those groups, one step at a time. So use your list of existing contacts to find more! Even if you only know two people who are interested in the COS, encourage them to find anyone else who is interested and bring them on board.

Hints:

Don't forget to strategically organize your contacts! These can be grouped by social circle (family, friends, work, Facebook), or how likely they are to respond to your message, but take the time to reach out to 2-5 of your personal acquaintances every few days, asking them to spread the word.

Leverage personal meetings! Remember, mass communication (such as through blog posts, Facebook statuses, or tweets) can be effective at reaching large numbers of people, but individual, personal contact is much more efficient. Do not underestimate the power of face-to-face contact with friends or family to win them over to the COS Project.

However you build your team, if you keep your volunteers reaching out to all of their individual contacts you will find you have enormous power to a) contact a large number of people quickly and b) contact even very influential people with the COS message.

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Suggestion 5: The Informant

Time required: 1-2 hours

Who: Local organizations

Setting: Casual but professional

Materials required: Handouts, and a visual aid of some sort (Ideally, the COS powerpoint or a video.)

The Informant is a basic strategy of giving public presentations that every leader in a grassroots movement needs to understand. It centers on leveraging local clubs, organizations, committees, and meetings. These organizations often have large numbers of likeminded individuals, which can help you spread the word and build your team efficiently. These organizations often maintain formal or informal ties to other organizations that you might also want to contact.

There's two primary ways to get the chance to present before one of these groups: Firstly, using contacts you already have to gain an invitation, or secondly, cold calling.

Usually, it is best to start with people or groups you already have ties to. If you're part of any sort of organization or club, reach out to the leadership, explain why you think the COS Project is something your members should be aware of, and ask for permission to give a brief presentation at a meeting. Or, next time the club meets, use any informal social time to reach out to individuals in the group, explaining the vision of the COS Project and passing out handouts. Don't forget to ask your friends if they're part of any groups who should hear the COS message!

After you've leveraged all the groups you have contacts with, you may need to start doing cold calls to find more groups to speak at. Many newspapers have a classified ads section that includes local announcements and meetings, so check your newspaper for ideas. You can also check public information boards found in places like your chamber of commerce, a local coffee shop or a library for local meeting announcements. Most places have groups like a local VFW, Elks Club, Rotary Club, etc; these are all good places with civic-minded people who might be interested.

Tips for cold calling:

1. When you cold call these organizations, know what you're going to say before you dial the number. Do some research on the group: know who they are, what they try to do/what their goals are, and what demographic they are composed of.
2. Have a 45 second explanation of the COS Project and why you think that group needs to hear your presentation.
3. Make sure you give them your name and contact information; they will probably not be able to confirm a meeting time right away, so they'll need to be able to call you back.
4. Remember, you don't need to convince the person who answers the phone that the COS Project is the right solution; you just need to intrigue them and convince them that the group's members need to be informed about the COS Project.

How to give a good presentation:

- F. Know the organization. Attend a few meetings before you present; start making friends in advance. Know who you will be speaking to and what they care about. Adjust your message accordingly.
- G. When you attend meetings to prepare for your own presentation, observe the operational style of the meeting: Is it formal? Do they use a stage and podium, or is it a round table? How long do speakers usually present for? How do the speakers dress? What sorts of visual aids do they rely on? Does the group like people who joke a lot, or are they all business? Remember, the more you know ahead of time, the more comfortable you will feel and the more natural you will seem to your audience. Match the style that you observe from other presenters at that group. If in doubt, dress up.
- H. Bring handouts and visual aids. Use powerpoint if possible, but remember, don't be distracted by a complicated system that isn't working. Just ignore it and move on.
- I. What is the political climate of the members? Conservative or liberal? Nonpartisan? Uninformed or apathetic? Depending on how aware the members are of political issues, you may find that they are already well aware of the problems in Washington D.C. and just need to hear your explanation of the solution. That's great; focus on that. But if there may be people in the audience unfamiliar with the political situation in the USA today, you may need to explain much more background in order for the COS message to make sense. If in doubt, ask an experienced member of the group how politically aware the members are.
- J. Remember: You're the expert. Be confident and clear. You know more about your subject than any of them, and thus, you have a unique position, able to give advice and opinions. Use that! But also be humble. Remember that you are a guest of the meeting, and that you want them to like you. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know an answer to a problem. Just tell them that you're still learning, like them, and that you will research the answer and get back to them. Then, email your question to me.
- K. Finally, after you give your presentation, stick around at the meeting. Socialize with the members, get to know them, be friendly, have fun. Talk to anyone who is interested and get them on your team.

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Suggestion 6: The Airwaves

Time required: .5-2 hours/ week

Who: Local and national radio audiences

Setting: Casual but professional

Materials required: A telephone, a radio, and some reference notes

Despite the growth of TV and the recent explosion of the internet, radio still has vast power to reach the American people. Radio is the most accessible mass-communication we have in the U.S.; a \$12 receiver anywhere in the USA is all you need. This is particularly true of talk and news radio; although many people now use mp3 players or cds to get music, talk and news radio is an important source of information and analysis for many citizens. We need to leverage the power of radio and make sure that our voice is part of the information and analysis that reaches this broad spectrum of the USA.

What follows is a brief summary of how to utilize radio; we are also gauging interest in setting up national media training for our District Captains. If you're interested, please email me!

There are two primary types of talk radio to target: large, nationally syndicated radio, and local radio.

1. Large National Radio

Targeting large talk radio requires you to be familiar with these talk radio shows and their hosts. Listen to popular shows from all political persuasions. Conservative radio shows like Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage, Hugh Hewitt, and Sean Hannity are all good sources of conservative analysis and opinion. Listen to one or two of these regularly, and get a feel for the topics and style the host uses. Also listen to progressive radio hosts such as Thom Hartmann, Randi Rhodes, Ed Schulz, and Stephanie Miller. Work hard to understand where they're coming from, take note of what kinds of callers they respond most positively to, and how to sound reasonable, intelligent, and likeable, even when the host disagrees with you. You should also write down the show's phone number for future reference.

After you've done your homework and become very familiar with a few of these shows, start calling in regularly. You probably won't get on the air the first time, so be patient. When you call, you will likely talk to someone who will ask for basic information such as your first name and your city. If they do put you through, have the sound turned off on your radio so that it does not feedback through your phone microphone. Remember, whatever noise is around you will be heard on the radio; the noisier it is, the harder it is to understand and the less credibility you will have.

Be prepared in advance with a brief comment or question. The hosts may or may not want to let you speak for very long, so have a one or two sentence comment ready to go. Be brief and to the point.

Present a question or a comment and suggest that the host and audience consider the Convention of States Project as a solution. Or, if the show is already about the COS Project, explain a misunderstanding or important but unclear issue. Have notes on what you want to say and answers to a few questions you expect. Don't interrupt; don't be angry even if the host is rude. You are the voice of the COS Project. Be calm, polite, and respectful.

For a more detailed handbook on making effective talk radio calls, I strongly recommend that you [check out this link](#). The brief handbook found there looks like an excellent guide.

2. Local Radio

Although national radio is valuable for efficiently influencing a large audience, local radio is important for you as you seek to build your team of volunteers locally. Additionally, local radio has many hours of radio to fill, and they are often quite willing to feature local leaders for extended interviews. Listen to your local talk radio, and call the studio to request an interview. Tell them who you are and what you do briefly. You don't need to convince them that your solution is right; you do need to convince them that their audience needs to hear what you have to say.

Prepare for the interview like you would prepare for any question and answer session. Be familiar with the most frequently asked questions; know the COS process; know how you want your local audience to act on your words. Ask the host in advance how much time you will have and, if possible, what questions he might have, but in the interview, be ready to follow the conversation wherever your host takes it. Remember, if you don't know the answer to an unusual question, that's ok! Direct your audience to our website for more information, and, if possible, after the interview contact us for the answer; then follow up with the host and answer his question. The more freely you're able to converse about the COS Project and your local activities, the more confident and at ease you will seem.

Remember to let your team know when and on what station you will be speaking, spread the word, and don't forget to let us in the national office know as well!

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Appendix A: A Few Notes on Video

Video can be a powerful tool for District Captains in three major ways: To add interest and variety to a speech; to spread the word on social media, and to help you refine your speaking style.

A: Using video in presentations

Pick an interesting, high quality video about .5-5 minutes long. The video can summarize the COS message, or just highlight one individual facet. The purpose of this video is to give your audience a chance to hear from someone besides you; if the video is well chosen this will keep your audience interested and add credibility to your message.

Often, videos are a good way to begin a presentation: a brief summary of the project that will pique your audience's curiosity and give them an overview that you will then cover in much more detail. An introductory video can be up to roughly 5 minutes long. Here's a good COS introductory video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVQH0JbwIgA>

You can also use short clips during your presentation to keep your audience awake and interested. Funny clips illustrating your point are ideal for this; these should be 30 seconds long. You don't want them to take too long or people will lose context of your speech and get distracted. These sorts of clips don't necessarily need to be COS videos; any entertaining short clip that works as an illustration could be ideal. Be careful to avoid copyright infringement; if in doubt about whether or not you can legally use material in your presentation, you should probably not use it. Always give credit to your sources, and don't use more than 30 seconds or 10% of any non COS material.

A good summary video can also be a good way to end your presentation. A 1-3 minute video can be ideal to review the major points of the COS Project and leave your audience impressed and interested. You can find all COS created videos here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC0eXtGEMvjxpdYQI2LUiVw>

B. Using video in social media

Video in social media can be very powerful, but it needs to be short. Most people won't watch videos from social media such as Facebook for longer than a minute. 30 seconds is the ideal length, providing enough time to summarize the COS Project before losing your audience's attention. Share these videos in social media feeds with a brief message explaining why your audience should watch it. Remember that social media is not really information or news oriented; social media users tend to be looking for entertainment; so focus on being entertaining. Here's a good 30 second COS video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFsdARxtrds&feature=player_detailpage

This is where the exception to the one minute rule comes in: social media users will watch a longer video if it is suitably entertaining. You can find some good choices here:

https://www.facebook.com/conventionofstates/app_486254294756872

C. Using video to help refine your presentation

Before you give a presentation practice your speech a few times in front of a camera at home. Make the environment as close to what it will be like at the real presentation as possible – dress up, use a table for a podium, stand up, and use your visual aids. Set a timer for the length of time you will be allowed to speak. When you study the video, watch for the following issues: speaking too fast or too slow, too many filler words such as “um”, unprofessional language; mumbling or other unclear speaking; distracting or nonexistent facial expressions; distracting or non-existent mannerisms; distractions with your clothing, visual aids, or powerpoint; and anything else that will detract from your message and image as an intelligent, professional American citizen.

Avoid being boring, so feel free to move around, use gestures, and facial expressions, but practice them so they appear natural and not distracting. Although practiced mannerisms sound like they would seem fake, many speakers realize that without practice, their mannerisms and facial expressions fail to express the message properly. Try to have an easy to remember outline so you don't need to rely on notes.

Practice and edit your speech until you are able to speak clearly, professionally, and normally without going too long or too short. Remember to make eye contact with your audience. Don't be boring, and don't let problems with visual aids or other elements distract you from your message; if they don't work, discard them and move on. Have a friend watch your practice speeches and identify problem areas you might have missed.

Finally, when you give the presentation, record it, and watch it afterwards for ways you can refine your speech. With most consumer level cameras, being closer to the speaker is better, and using a tripod is always recommended. Since you're just recording these for your own use, you don't need them to be super high quality, but they should have clear audio and video of you. If you don't have a camera, don't worry. Ask around, or use a smart phone. If you don't have a tripod, have a friend hold the camera still by leaning on a table or a wall for support.