



## HOST GUIDE

# Letter Writing Party

**Thank you for hosting a Swing Left Letter Writing Party!** Working together, we have the power to sustain our progress! We have a lot of work to do, so thank you for being a part of this movement.

Our Swing Left groups and hosts have pioneered letter-writing parties that resulted in millions of letters for the 2020 General Election! Letter writing parties are a great way to connect with our friends and families around a high impact action. It's also an important tactic toward organizing our broader community.

## Event Goals

1. Encourage your letter writers to step up - whether that means committing to write five letters a week or hosting a letter writing party themselves!
2. Bring your friends and other Swing Left volunteers together to build community and get them excited about Swing Left's [10-year plan to strengthen democracy](#).

## Hosting Your Event—Step by Step

### Planning Your Event

Virtual letter writing events will be different from in-person letter writing parties in two ways:

- Letter writers will need to sign up for Vote Forward, a Swing Left affiliate, and print letters on their own. You may also be able to print the letters and distribute them to volunteers through packet pick-up or drop-off. If you choose this option, please follow local guidelines to ensure safety of everyone involved.
- You'll need to plan for how volunteers gather—virtually by remote video/audio conferencing. (Resources for this below.)

And you'll still want to do many of the same things you would already do to host an in-person party, so here's how to get started.

- ❑ [Sign up for a Vote Forward account](#) if you are a new Vote Forward volunteer. Print 5 letters and try out the letter-writing process. Make sure you are ready to train other volunteers on how to write letters.
- ❑ [Choose a video/audio conference option](#) that will suit your event. Video conferencing is a key part of your Virtual Letter Writing Party. There are several options, including the opportunity to “rent for free” a Zoom account from Swing Left for the duration of your party. Volunteers can join video conferencing with their computer and webcam, but can also still participate if they don't have a webcam (by audio only) or with their smartphone (if they don't have a computer).
- ❑ List your event on [Swing Left's public calendar via Mobilize](#), so people can find it. If you are part of Swing Left's college program, post your event [here](#). (Learn [how to create](#) a Mobilize virtual letter writing event.)
- ❑ **Invite your friends, family, neighbors, and colleagues.** You can also reach out to local aligned organizations and Swing Left groups who might be interested in promoting your event. Learn best practices for how to do this in the [Swing Left Recruiting and Promotion](#) guide.
- ❑ **Ask your invitees to contribute to your event.** Experienced letter writers can help answer questions in chat or support getting volunteers set up and ready to print their letters from Vote Forward ahead of the event.
- ❑ View [a recording of a past virtual letter writing party host training](#).

## Getting Ready for Your Event

- ❑ **Choose a Vote Forward campaign for your event.** If you'd like all volunteers to write letters for the same campaign, select that campaign and let volunteers know which campaign you've chosen. This is not required - volunteers can choose their own campaigns if they'd like to!

- ❑ **Print 20 letters that you will write during the party.** This will also help you understand the process so you can help your party attendees. You can walk through each step at [Swing Left's "Write Letters from Home"](#) guide.
- ❑ **Optional: Apply for Vote Forward's Postage Subsidy Program** to help offset the main cost of letter writing (i.e. buying stamps!) for eligible volunteers. Students involved in the Swing Left College Programs are encouraged to apply.
  - ❑ **To apply for the postage subsidy program,** email [stamps@votefwd.org](mailto:stamps@votefwd.org). Ask to apply for the postage subsidy program in the body of your email. If you're a student, use the subject line "College student - need stamps!" You will receive a response from Vote Forward with a link to apply for the postage subsidy program. Complete this form to apply.
  - ❑ **Wait for your stamps to arrive.** Stamps can take up to two weeks to arrive. However, this shouldn't stop you from writing letters right away. Prepared letters can be stamped once you receive them.
  - ❑ **Follow Vote Forward's instructions before sending your letters.** You will receive an email from Vote Forward with a couple of quick steps to complete to verify that you have used your stamps. Please read those instructions carefully and complete the necessary steps BEFORE sending your letters.
- ❑ **Test out video conferencing and share instructions ahead of the event with attendees.** You'll want to test audio and screen-sharing on your computer before the event. Enlist another volunteer to test the video conferencing to make sure it will work when your party attendees are on the line. Take notes on how the features of the conference tool work and provide these instructions to your attendees ahead of time. Check out our [guide on video conferencing resources](#) for your virtual letter writing party for more help on this topic.
- ❑ **Let volunteers know how to prepare to participate in your event.** We recommend providing all of this information in the "Additional info for attendees (optional)" field under "Event Logistics and Accessibility" section of your Mobilize event so that the information is sent in the automated email that goes out when they register. Then send follow-up emails before the event to ensure they are ready - there is a sample template in this [guide](#). Here's what attendees need to do before your party:
  - ❑ **Sign up as a volunteer on Vote Forward at [votefwd.org/swingleft](https://votefwd.org/swingleft).** *It takes a day or so to get approved as a volunteer, so plan to sign up 3-4 days ahead of the party.*
  - ❑ **Learn how to download 20 letters to write at your party and prepare their materials.** [Swing Left's "Write Letters from Home"](#) page has step-by-step information to help volunteers get set up on Vote Forward and download 20

letters for your party, [including this short video](#). It also lets volunteers know the additional materials they will need, such as stamps, a blue pen, and #10 business envelopes. *Note: If volunteers don't have stamps or envelopes at this time, they can still participate in the GOTV letter writing campaigns and get envelopes and stamps later. Just make sure to plan to follow up with them.*

- ❑ **Understand how to join your party with your chosen audio/video conferencing tool.** Most are easy to use and provide help content online that you can link to.
- ❑ **Optional: Host a pre-party “tech support office hours” event to support volunteers** who have questions about signing up for Vote Forward, downloading letters, or using the audio/video conferencing system. It's a great way to get more experience with your audio/video conferencing system too!
- ❑ **Review the sample agenda for a party** below and customize it for your event. Share your version with anyone helping out during your event.
- ❑ **Acquaint yourself with Swing Left's [10-year plan](#)** and the state whose letters you've chosen to adopt (if you've chosen to write letters for a specific campaign). This will help you explain to your volunteers why we are writing to voters.
- ❑ **Write up the agenda and event goals** on a slide or document to share at the beginning of your virtual party. You can make a copy of the [Sample Slides for Virtual Letter Writing Party Welcome, Introductions, and Training](#) and adapt if you'd like.

## Virtual Hosting Tips

Virtual events are just as effective as in-person events, but you might need to adjust a few aspects of your letter writing party. Here's some ideas how:

- ❑ **Be inclusive and connect with guests even though you are online.** Some volunteers can be more hesitant to speak up online. As you begin the virtual party, welcome volunteers and, depending on the size of your group, consider having everyone introduce themselves *briefly*. Check out the [agenda](#) for more ideas for icebreakers.
- ❑ **Help volunteers feel comfortable with the audio/video conferencing tools so they can fully participate.** New technology can be daunting. You might offer pre-party tech “office hours” to help people get up and running on your audio/video conference tool of choice. You can also let volunteers know that you'll start the party 15 minutes early and

give a tutorial on the tool. Potentially identify someone who is tech savvy to provide technical support throughout the call.

- ❑ **Delegate tasks to other people so you aren't the only person talking.** Give people roles so that you're not the only one doing all the talking. If you have veteran party hosts at your party, they can help you present the agenda portion of the event.
- ❑ **Be positive and constructive.** Keep the tone upbeat—this is an exciting and participatory event!
- ❑ **Get creative with making the virtual party fun.** Here are ideas on how to engage others even while you are virtual:
  - ❑ Offer attendees the opportunity to introduce each other's pets, kids and family on their webcam or via the audio too!
  - ❑ You might consider playing some soft music in the background while people are working.
  - ❑ If your audio/video conferencing allows [break-outs rooms](#), you can use breakout rooms to give volunteers a chance to meet in small groups and get to know each other while writing letters.
  - ❑ If you have musicians in the group, they can serenade you.
  - ❑ You could take “commercial” breaks every {X} minutes to discuss volunteer impressions or other information. You could prepare trivia about the state you are writing letters for, or ask another volunteer to help you research important issues in the state to present during breaks.
  - ❑ Encourage the natural chatting that occurs at in-person parties even if you are online.
  - ❑ Themes, costumes, and decorations are all welcome additions to your party - every day is some sort of holiday ([and you can find out which holiday here](#)).
- ❑ **Show everyone what Swing Left's movement looks like!** Share a group pic, video or anecdote from your event on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook (or all three!) Using the hashtag and @ below will help Swing Left retweet/repost! *Important note: since you are addressing these letters to private citizens, please make sure to obscure or cover addresses and full names in your photos.*
  - ❑ Use the hashtag [#swingleft](#)
  - ❑ Tag Swing Left with [@swingleft](#)
- ❑ **At the end of the event, make sure to remind letter writers what to do with their letters after the party.** Vote Forward has a mail-on or mail-by date depending on the type of letter. You can find it on the campaign page on the Vote Forward website for the mail date. You may be writing letters to send many months ahead so make sure you

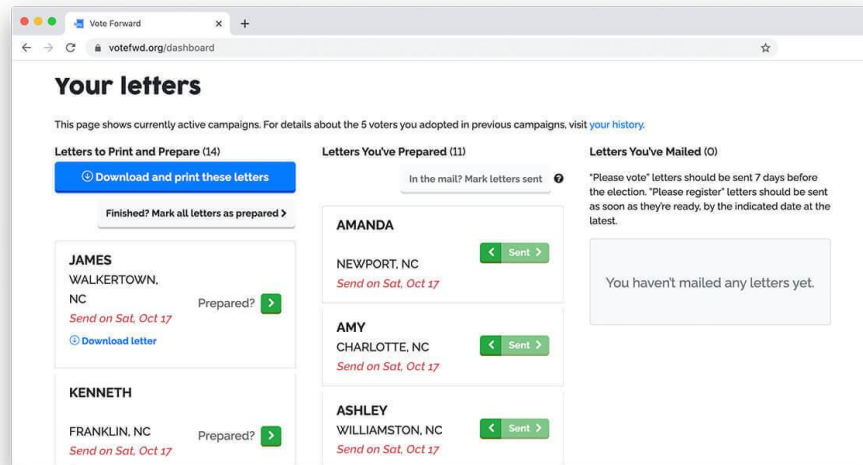
have a safe place to store them and you put a reminder in your calendar! Letter writers should choose a designated place in their home to store all their letters and include a note about where the letters are stored in a calendar reminder. It's also helpful to package up letters from the same campaign (in a manila folder or by using rubber bands) and label them with the campaign name and mail date on the front of the package. There is a slide in [Sample Slides for Virtual Letter Writing Party Welcome, Introductions, and Training](#) that can help!

## Following Up Immediately After the Event

- ❑ **Store your letters in a safe place** and put a reminder on your calendar for the day before the Vote Forward mail date as mentioned above.
- ❑ **Make sure to mark your letters as prepared in Vote Forward.**
- ❑ **Post your next virtual letter writing event on [Mobilize](#).** Encourage your attendees to post their own parties.
- ❑ **Close out your event by updating who attended and who didn't in Mobilize.** Check out the [Mobilize guide](#) to learn how to manage your attendees. This process helps us track how many people came to events across the country and will allow you to follow up after the party.
- ❑ **Send a thank you and follow-up email** to all attendees after the event. There is a template email and information on how to send emails through Mobilize in our [tips and tricks guide](#) for setting up a virtual letter writing party on Mobilize. In this email, let volunteers know:
  - ❑ How to mark letters as prepared in Vote Forward.
  - ❑ What to do with their letters until the designated mail-date. As described above, they should put the letters somewhere safe, make a note of the location, and put a reminder in their calendar for the day before the mail date.
  - ❑ How they can [join your next letter writing party](#).
  - ❑ How they can set up their own letter writing party: [swingleft.org/virtual-letter-party](https://swingleft.org/virtual-letter-party).
  - ❑ How they can [join a local group](#).

## Following Up Before the Vote Forward Mail-on or Mail-by Date

- ❑ **Remind your party volunteers a day before the Vote Forward mail date** to send their letters and update Vote Forward. You can download the list of party attendees after your party and save it in order to send this reminder. Learn how to download the list of party attendees, and find [a template email in this guide](#).
- ❑ **Mail the letters you prepared on the designated date.** Vote Forward has a mail-on or mail-by date depending on the type of letter. You can find it on the campaign page on the Vote Forward website for the mail date.
- ❑ **Update the status of your letters** in your [Vote Forward](#) dashboard by moving letters from “Letters You’ve Prepared” to “Letters You’ve Mailed.”



## Detailed Sample Agenda for Hosts

This agenda will walk you through launching your audio/video call, welcoming letter writers, training letter writers on writing letters and using your conferencing tool, encouraging socializing virtually, writing letters virtually, and wrapping up so that attendees keep coming back to write more letters!

*(These are sample times—feel free to adapt to what works for your event.)*

### **Pre-Party Tech Support (Optional) + Gathering (~15 minutes before the party)**

- Jump on early to help anyone who is new to audio/video conferencing and may need some help to learn how to turn on their webcam and mute and unmute.
- As people join, welcome them and let them know the time you'll start the party. If your audio/video conference option offers chat, ask people to introduce themselves on the chat as they are joining.

### **Introductions (~5 minutes) (don't skip this - it's a great way to build community)**

*Resources and Materials: Sample Welcome and Training Presentation*

- Start by introducing yourself and your motivation for hosting the event. Then briefly review the agenda. You can share slides to walk through each agenda item if that works for you or do it verbally!
- Spend some time orienting attendees briefly on how to use the video conferencing tool you are using so they know how to mute, ask questions, turn on their video, etc.
- Go around the “virtual room” and ask everyone to briefly introduce themselves. As they are introducing themselves, write down who showed up. Here are suggested icebreaker questions:
  - What motivated you to come today and get involved?
  - How are you feeling about upcoming elections and the work you're going to do?
  - What was one way you contributed to Democratic victories in past years?

### **Swing Left 10-Year Strategy Overview (~5 minutes) (Optional)**

*Resources and Materials: Sample Welcome and Training Presentation, Swing Left's 10-year plan*

- If your volunteers are new to Swing Left, you can take a few minutes to help them understand why they are doing this work by describing Swing Left's 10-year plan to strengthen democracy.
- Explain to your guests which campaign you'll be writing to, and why the state you've chosen is important.

### **Demonstrate Letter Writing Process (~10 minutes)**

*Resources and Materials: Sample Welcome and Training Presentation*



- Talk through how to complete a letter from start to finish. You can use slides or demonstrate live using your webcam. Let volunteers know that the most common errors are:
  - **Addressing the letters to the wrong voter.** Remember the voter name and address is on the bottom of each letter.
  - **Using their own address as the return address,** as opposed to their first name, last initial and “Vote Forward” on the second line.
  - **Putting the wrong letter in the wrong envelope.** It’s a best practice to wait to seal all your envelopes until you’ve finished your batch of letters. Go back through each envelope to make sure the voter information at the bottom of the letter matches both the letter salutation and the voter’s address on the envelope.
- Give volunteers a few minutes to write their “Why I Vote” message on scratch paper.
- Optionally, you can ask attendees to share their “Why I Vote” messages out loud.
- Ask each attendee to complete one letter and show it via webcam, if possible. If volunteers can’t show you, you can also just ask if anyone has questions after completing the first letter.
- Remind volunteers that these letters are personalized for each recipient (the unique recipient is at the bottom of every letter), and they should not write on them until they’re ready. Some volunteers will get confused by the cover sheet of 20 addresses and ignore the recipient listed on the letter.
- Let volunteers know they can start writing!

### Immediate Action: Writing Letters (45 minutes)

- Ask volunteers after the first 10 minutes or so if anyone needs help. If your audio/video conferencing option provides the option to chat, you can let volunteers know they can ask questions in the chat if they don’t feel comfortable speaking up.
- Encourage volunteers to talk with each other on the video call as they write letters. You can use some of the ideas mentioned in the virtual event host tips.

### Closing (~10 minutes)

- Do a quick closing. Ask each person to share how they feel they can best contribute to winning in upcoming elections in one sentence (and their name again, if it is a big group!). Potentially ask volunteers to show their letters (if they have a webcam) and set a goal for letters written!
- Briefly remind volunteers what to do with their letters after the party.
  - Move them to the “Prepared” column in Vote Forward.

- Store them in a safe place until they need to be mailed.
  - Put a note in their calendar on the date the letters need to be mailed.
- Encourage your attendees to sign up to host letter writing parties. They can post their [letter writing parties events here](#).
- Thank everyone for coming and remind them of the overall goal: protect and expand democracy and defeat the GOP!

## Letter Writing Party Resources

- [Set up your Letter Writing Party event here](#)—if you are part of Swing Left's college program, post your event [here](#).
- [Vote Forward Letter Writing Instructions](#)
- [FAQS from Vote Forward](#)
- [Video: How-to Write Letters to Voters from Vote Forward](#)
- [Video: How-to Host a Virtual Letter Writing](#)
- [Sample Agenda](#)
- [Sample Slides](#) for Virtual Letter Writing Party Welcome, Introductions, and Training—you can make a copy of this presentation and adapt for your own needs.
- [Tips and Tricks Guide for Managing Virtual Letter Writing Parties on Mobilize](#)
- [Tips and Tricks Guide for Video Conferencing Resources](#)
- [Swing Left's 10-year Plan to Strengthen Democracy](#)
- [Event recruitment and promotion guide](#)
- Vote Forward Support Issue? Email [help@votefwd.org](mailto:help@votefwd.org)