

# A Note on Choice Event Organizing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly changed life as we know it in the United States and throughout the world. As we work together to address this worldwide health crisis, we understand that hosting traditional in-person events is neither safe nor socially responsible. In the meantime, we encourage you to consider and explore options for hosting “virtual” Choice Events. Many virtual-meeting websites, platforms, apps, and software, including Google Hangouts, Zoom, Skype, and GoToMeeting, are free and easy to use. Examples of Choice Events that can be conducted virtually include: book clubs, discussion groups, readings, performances, support groups, writing workshops, fundraisers, yoga classes, and postcard/letter-writing parties.

With a little bit of imagination, creativity, and innovation, you will find that most of the event ideas and suggestions listed in this tool kit can be hosted online. While

virtual Choice Events allow you to connect with and reach pro-choice proponents all across the country, we also invite you to “think globally and act locally” by building relationships in your own neighborhoods so that you can easily and sustainably transition into in-person meetings later on.

The danger and demands of the COVID-19 pandemic are real and many. Disturbingly, some state legislatures are now even exploiting COVID-19 safety precautions to try to ban abortion. Using online technology and the power of the literature in *Choice Words: Writers on Abortion*, we can find strength, comfort, and community in this crisis. *Choice Words* reminds us that abortion is an essential medical procedure that transcends time, cultures, and continents and that abortion experiences are *human experiences* of the mind, body, heart, will, and spirit.

## CHOICE WORDS ORGANIZING TOOL KIT

Literature has always been at the forefront of profound shifts in human consciousness. That’s the change that is needed now. It’s time for *Choice Words: Writers on Abortion*, the first major literary anthology of poems, stories, and literary essays about abortion. Twenty years in the making,

this landmark collection amplifies the voices of people across continents and centuries who dared to claim authorship of their abortion experiences. Together, these essays, poems, and prose stories testify to the political power of defying shame.

## CHANGING THE ABORTION CONVERSATION WITH CHOICE WORDS

Anti-choice voices have dominated the conversation about abortion in much of the world for decades. In the US, the vitriolic, inflammatory rhetoric of a minority have successfully reduced the voices of a pro-choice majority to a whisper. As the Supreme Court contemplates overturning *Roe v. Wade*, silence is something we cannot abide. Pro-choice proponents and reproductive justice advocates alike must mobilize. When we cast aside shame and silence about abortion and gather together in a spirit of honest support and loving, positive energy, we open the way towards a whole new attitude towards ourselves. Speaking boldly and candidly about abortion in all forms and at all times is one of the most profound, radical acts we can perform to reclaim our rights.

It is our hope that *Choice Words* will contribute to a grassroots movement towards reproductive freedom on both cultural and political levels. In the process, we hope to invite lasting connections among those of us who have had and can have abortions. People across the country are using *Choice Words* as a tool to bring pro-choice activists and neighbors together, changing the conversation through events and conversations that put our reproductive needs at the center. In the process of defending and protecting reproductive rights, we can also rediscover our own power, individually and together. We believe that reproductive freedom is a fundamental human right at the foundation of feminist community—and that feminist community can change the world.

## CHOICE EVENT PLANNING IN 10 STEPS

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|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Step 1:</b> Decide what type of Choice Event to organize.     | <b>Step 6:</b> Secure a venue.        |
| <b>Step 2:</b> Get friends to help plan and organize your event. | <b>Step 7:</b> Create a program.      |
| <b>Step 3:</b> Brainstorm a list of potential guests.            | <b>Step 8:</b> Invite cosponsors.     |
| <b>Step 4:</b> Set a date.                                       | <b>Step 9:</b> Share your event.      |
| <b>Step 5:</b> Set a budget.                                     | <b>Step 10:</b> Be bold, but be safe. |

*Now that you are ready to speak up and out about abortion with Choice Words, it's time to plan your Choice Event.*

### STEP 1: DECIDE WHAT TYPE OF CHOICE EVENT YOU WANT TO ORGANIZE.

Do you want a small, intimate gathering in your home with a few close friends, or a large fundraising gala to benefit a reproductive justice organization? A block party? A cocktail party? A community performance of readings from the book? A virtual event? A backyard BBQ? An abortion speak-out? All events—large or small, public or private, casual or formal—are powerful. The specifics of your event are not

as important as bringing people together to discuss, defend, and demand abortion rights and access. How you do that, and who you choose to do it with, really are your CHOICE.

Following the organization of *Choice Words* into sections on Mind, Body, Heart, Will, and Spirit, here are some possible event categories and ideas for your Choice Event:

#### *Mind*

1. Book Discussion Group (see the Book Discussion Guide [HERE](#)).
2. Writing Workshop Focusing on Abortion Experiences
3. Coffeeshop or Bookstore Reading/Discussion
4. *Choice Words* Discussion and Knitting Circle
5. Dramatic Reading/Performance from the Book
  - a. Community reading
  - b. Celebrity reading
  - c. Reading followed by a screening of *Choice Words* contributor Desiree Cooper's seven-minute film *The Choice*, based on her story in the book. Available on the "Media" page of the Choice Words Action website.

#### *Body*

1. Clinic Fundraiser
2. *Choice Words* Book Drive for Clinic
3. Yoga Class
  - a. A fundraising class to benefit a reproductive justice organization
  - b. May include a Choice Words-inspired meditation

#### *Heart*

1. Fundraiser for Abortion Doula Organization(s)
2. Abortion Support/Book Discussion Groups
  - a. Groups for those who have had an abortion

- b. Groups for those who are planning to have an abortion
  - c. Groups for transmen who have had abortions
  - d. Groups for abortion clinic providers and staff
  - e. Groups for those whose partners have had an abortion
3. Choice “Credit” Event: “Give credit to those whose work gives us ‘choice.’”
    - a. Gatherings to recognize the heroism of and to express community gratitude to health clinic providers and staff
  4. Personal Storytelling Event

### *Will*

1. Pro-Choice Candidate or Organization Fundraiser
2. Organize a Community Clinic Volunteer-Recruitment Drive
3. Organize a Pro-Choice Political Protest, March, or Rally
4. Organize a Public Reading from *Choice Words* on the steps of a government building
5. Postcard or Letter-Writing Party
  - a. Write to a politician or business owner—someone with power over a bill or policy that affects choice.
  - b. Handwritten letters are taken far more seriously than emails or phone calls.
  - c. You could even include quotes from *Choice Words* on the postcards!

### *Spirit*

1. Organize an Abortion Doula Training
2. Create small or large abortion rituals in a group, based on rituals in *Choice Words*
3. Form a group to discuss *Choice Words* within your faith institution
4. Organize a forgiveness and/or healing service for who have had an abortion
5. Form an interdenominational group of women for choice

*These ideas are just the beginning! Each event will be unique, and there are so many possibilities. We hope you will want to help inspire others by telling about your event, and maybe sharing pictures, on the Choice Words Action media page and social media.*

## **STEP 2: GET FRIENDS TO HELP PLAN AND ORGANIZE YOUR EVENT.**

Depending on the type, size, and scale of the Choice Event you want to organize, planning your event may feel overwhelming. But just as you are not alone in the fight for reproductive liberty, you do not have to be alone in bringing people together around *Choice Words*.

Brainstorm friends, family, or neighbors who might be interested in co-hosting and/or co-organizing your event with you. If you don't personally know anyone who might want to help, find and contact a local feminist group or organization to see if their members or staff might be willing to pitch in with planning. You never know, you may begin

organizing your event alone only to find willing and eager planning partners later on in the process.

Once you gather a group of friends or form a committee to help with Choice Event planning, schedule a meeting to delegate planning responsibilities, check on planning progress, and finalize event details.

### STEP 3: BRAINSTORM A LIST OF POTENTIAL GUESTS.

Your guest list will depend largely on what kind of event you've decided to organize. A guest list for a backyard BBQ or book club meeting is going to be different than one for a community fundraiser or formal gala.

Your comfort level may also impact your guest list. Do you feel comfortable inviting people who may not share the same views on reproductive justice? That's a question only you can answer. What you need to remember is that there is no wrong answer. Maybe you live in a conservative community and you only know a few people you feel

comfortable reaching out to. That is totally okay. Or a virtual event may be more comfortable for you so that you can control the number of attendees and even include those who live in remote areas. Do you want to organize an event only for people who can have abortions, or one that is open to all genders? Empowering and engaging people in candid conversations about abortion is a radical, revolutionary act. Regardless of the number of people at your Choice Event, every gathering offers the chance to inspire critical change, have fun, and create community.

### STEP 4: SET A DATE.

Again, the best date and time for your event is likely going to be determined by the type of event you are organizing. To increase attendance, set a date that is at least several weeks ahead of time. This will ensure plenty of time to plan, organize, and help avoid scheduling conflicts for your guests. You may want to tie your event to a special day related to "choice," such as International Women's Day, the Centennial Anniversary of Women's Suffrage, the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, or even Mother's Day (sometimes called Choice Day).

*Roe v. Wade* anniversary—January 22 (1973)  
International Women's Day—March 8  
National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers—March 10  
Women's History Month—March  
Mother's Day—Second Sunday in May  
Women's Suffrage Anniversary—June 4  
Seneca Falls Convention Anniversary—July 19

### STEP 5: SET A BUDGET.

There are a number of event ideas and venues that are basically free, like hosting a potluck at your home or organizing a book club meeting at a local library or coffee shop. Look for "choice-friendly" businesses willing to donate their space to your event in order to support Choice Words Action and local reproductive rights organizations. If your venue is a restaurant or coffee shop, guests can buy food and beverages on-site at no cost to you. There may also be "choice-friendly" local food/beverage vendors

willing to donate to your event free of charge or at a discounted rate.

If your event requires funding, figure out how much money you are able to spend on your event, or think of ways to raise money to fund a Choice Event. Once you know how much money you have to fund your event, decide how you are going to allocate the funds: *How much (if anything) will you spend on food/beverages for your event? How much are you willing/able to spend to rent a venue?*

### STEP 6: SECURE A VENUE.

From an intimate gathering in your home to a local feminist bookstore, the best venue for your Choice Event depends on your vision and goals for your event. Some questions to consider in selecting a venue are: *How many guests are you anticipating, and what is the maximum capacity of a prospective venue? What is your budget, and what is the cost (if any) of reserving a prospective venue? Is there adequate parking for your guests? If the venue does not have a private parking lot, is there adequate street parking? Is the location of a potential*

*venue convenient for most of your guests? Is the potential venue a women-owned and/or feminist business? Is the venue accessible?* These are not requirements by any means, but why not use your Choice Event to support local feminist and/or women-owned businesses!

Once you book your venue, be sure to reconfirm your venue and any food/beverage vendors as it gets closer to your event. Everybody needs a reminder now and again, and reminding the folks you are counting on to help you

execute your Choice Event may save you from subsequent headaches, mishaps, and oversights.

## STEP 7: CREATE A PROGRAM FOR YOUR EVENT.

Plan out the program for your event. The best program for your Choice Event is going to depend on the type of event you are organizing, how long you want your event to last, and any restrictions/limitations/conditions imposed by your venue. Please note that for those planning informal gatherings, a sample program might be as simple as:

1. Guest introductions and mingling (10 minutes)
2. Potluck meal (20 minutes)
3. Casual conversation/discussion of *Choice Words* (25 minutes)
4. Closing remarks/donation collection (5 minutes)

Even if your #ChoiceParty is going to be small, casual, and informal, planning a loose outline of your event is still a good idea. It will allow you to think more deeply about how you want your event to go, what you want to accomplish,

how you want the event to flow, how much time you have for various activities, what your needs are in terms of special guests, guest readers, or cosponsors, what details of your event you may not have thought of, etc. It will also help you visualize and set positive intentions for your Choice Event.

If you are organizing a community reading and discussion at a local bookstore or coffee shop, a sample program might include:

1. Guest introductions, sponsor introductions, and mingling (10 minutes)
2. Opening remarks from host/organizer (3-5 minutes)
3. Readings from *Choice Words* by guest readers (20 minutes)
4. A panel discussion (see discussion questions below) of *Choice Words* moderated by the organizer (20 minutes)
5. Closing remarks/donation collection (5 minutes)

## SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: HERE IS A LIST OF CHOICE WORDS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What text(s) from *Choice Words* most resonated with you and why?
2. How can we use *Choice Words* to make abortion less stigmatized, and create a culture of “abortion without apology?”
3. What is the relationship between literature and activism? How can literature inspire activism?
4. How can *Choice Words* re-inspire a national movement for reproductive justice?
5. What lessons can contemporary people learn from the historical texts in *Choice Words*? What do they teach us about the enduring fight for reproductive liberty?
6. How can we use *Choice Words* to convince neighbors and friends to commit to reproductive justice advocacy and activism?
7. How can we bring *Choice Words* and Choice Words Action to the most marginalized people among us?
8. How else can we use *Choice Words* and Choice Words Action to build feminist community?
9. Why is there so much power in abortion storytelling? How can abortion storytelling and literature empower us to reclaim our reproductive rights?
10. What are other ways we can use *Choice Words* as a tool to change the national conversation on reproductive justice?

For more detailed discussion questions about *Choice Words*, check out the [\*Choice Words Discussion Guide\*](#).

## STEP 8: INVITE CONTRIBUTORS, SPECIAL GUESTS, LOCAL CELEBRITIES, AND/OR COSPONSORS TO PARTICIPATE IN YOUR EVENT.

Once you plan your event program, ask yourself what you need in terms of any special guests. Do you want to invite a *Choice Words* contributor to speak at your event? Who

do you want to invite to perform book readings at your event? Do you have funds to support their attendance? Are there local reproductive justice organizations, activists, or

organizers you want to invite to participate in or cosponsor your event? Is there a local celebrity who may be willing to attend your event? How can you raise funds to compensate them? Do you need guest experts and/or a moderator for a discussion panel?

You do not need to have *Choice Words* contributors, special guests, local celebrities, or cosponsors to have a meaningful Choice Event. A successful Choice Event can consist of you and a couple of close friends, colleagues, or neighbors. However, if you do secure *Choice Words* contributors, special guests, local celebrities, or cosponsors for your event, be sure to follow up with and confirm their attendance prior

### Dear “Cosponsor,”

My name is Jane Roe, and I am organizing cosponsors for my community book reading event at “Favorite Feminist Bookstore” in Chicago on June 21 from 6 PM to 8 PM. The event will include readings and discussion of *Choice Words: Writers on Abortion* edited by Annie Finch: <https://www.haymarketbooks.org/books/1459-choice-words>. The first major anthology about abortion, *Choice Words* spans six continents and as many centuries and includes work by Margaret Atwood, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Ursula K. LeGuin, Audre Lorde, Joyce Carol Oates, Ntozake Shange, Gloria Steinem, Amy Tan, Lindy West, Mary Wollstonecraft, and many more.

I would like to invite your organization to cosponsor this event. As a cosponsor, your organization will be listed in event invitations and publicity, and you will have an opportunity to share literature and sign up new members/supporters at the event. You may also collect financial donations for your organization. All I ask in return is that you share information about the event with your members/staff, and send at least one person to the event to make a brief statement about your organization.

to your event. Despite your best efforts and reminders, your event probably won't go exactly as planned. That's okay! Just “KEEP CALM and Choice Event ON.”

You might consider inviting a local clinic(s), reproductive justice, or feminist business/organization(s) to co-sponsor your event. A quick Google search for all of the above in your city and/or state is a good way to find “choice-friendly” cosponsors. Once you've identified some potential cosponsors, contact them through their website or Facebook page. Here is a sample invitation to send to potential cosponsors with some general guidelines for co-sponsorship:

I would also like to encourage a member of your organization to participate in a panel discussion by choosing a short passage from the book (a poem, or a prose passage of 2-3 paragraphs or around 150 words) to share and discuss at the event. This will enrich the discussion, given your deep commitment to and experience with reproductive freedom.

Thank you for your time, and your work and commitment to reproductive justice. I hope you will consider joining me and other reproductive justice supporters and advocates for this Choice Event!

Sincerely,  
Jane Roe

*If you do not hear back from a potential cosponsor, don't hesitate to politely follow-up on your invitation after a week or two. Email and messaging inboxes fill up fast, especially for busy organizations and businesses, so following-up can be critical to ensuring your invitations don't get overlooked in this era of digital overload. If after a polite follow-up or two you still don't hear back, it's time to move on and explore other options for sponsorship.*

## STEP 9: SHARE YOUR EVENT.

Share your event on Choice Words Action ([www.choice-wordsaction.org](http://www.choice-wordsaction.org)) and social media. We encourage you to register your event on the “Events” section of the Choice Words Action website to allow others to find it and to share Choice Events in their area. The Choice Words Action movement is based on creating a culture of “abortion without apology.” We want to empower people to speak up and out about reproductive justice. We encourage you and all of your event participants, contributors, cosponsors, and

guests to proudly post and share pictures and videos from your event on all social media platforms. Here are some suggested hashtags to include with your social media posts:

**Twitter:**

#choiceevent #choicewords #choicevoices  
#choicewordsaction #choicelitaction #choiceparty

**Instagram:**

#choiceevent #choiceparty #choicemovement  
#choicewords #choicecommunity #choicepartyandproud  
#choicepower #mypartyforchoice #choicesocial  
#celebratechoice #choicepride #choicealliance  
#choicephrases #choicewordsnotsilence #choicesoiree  
#choiceball #choicecookout #choicemoments

#choicespeech #choicebash #choicegroup #choicegathering  
#choicecoffeetalk #choicecoffeechats #choicewordsaction  
#choicemovement #choicereadings #choicetogether  
#choicegathering #circleforchoice #choiceconnect  
#choicewomen #choicevoices #choicelitaction @  
choicewordsanthology

*Please submit images and photos from your #ChoiceEvent to the “Media” section of the Choice Words Action website, and we will post them on the site!*

**STEP 10: BE BOLD, BUT BE SAFE.**

Although Choice Words Action is working hard to change the cultural climate and national conversation around reproductive rights, anti-choice threats and violence are real. We welcome you to share and promote your events far and wide, but the safety of you and your guests is of the utmost importance. Use your discretion, and follow your instincts throughout the Choice Event process. Don't share specifics about your event with anyone who might not be safe, and do your best to make sure that any venue or vendors you work with are “choice-friendly.” **If you are not sure about this and are meeting in a public place, make sure that you have access to a closed room (not a table in the middle of a restaurant or coffeehouse, for example).** If an event is in your home, when listing your event on Choice Words Action, it's good practice to list a general neighborhood/area as the location, then share the address with new people one by one later on, after you get a sense of who

they are. You could screen them briefly by phone or video call, or ask folks to “apply” to your event by sending a brief statement about why they want to attend. We want you to be bold and brave about “choice,” but we never want you to be unsafe. If something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't, and we support you in prioritizing safety above all else.

We hope you will enjoy your #ChoiceParty and find satisfying new connections. Maybe you'll start a discussion or support circle that will continue meeting long after reproductive freedom and justice become a lasting reality!

For more information, you can find us at our websites, linked below, or [by using our contact form](#).

In love and solidarity,  
Annie Finch <https://anniefinch.com/>  
Ashley Jordan <https://fashionforwardfeminist.com/>  
Desiree Cooper <http://www.descooper.com/>

*WITHOUT COMMUNITY, THERE IS NO LIBERATION.*

—AUDRE LORDE