

Organizing tips & tricks

How To Organize A Town Hall Meeting

A town hall meeting is a large public meeting where community members share their views with their elected representatives present. Elected representatives have the opportunity to share their own views and positions in return.

Decide who the sponsoring organization(s) should be with the goal of drawing a large group of participants.

Decide on 3 or 4 possible dates for the town hall meeting.

Call potential co-sponsoring organizations. Explain that each co-sponsor can give testimony of 3-5 minutes. Ask each co-sponsoring group to commit to bringing 10 people to the town hall meeting (or whatever number of people you decide.) Once groups agree to co-sponsor the event, call the appropriate legislators in your area to see if they will participate and what dates would work for them.

If you cannot get elected officials to attend this time, you could turn the event into a Community Teach-In.

Secure a location to hold the town hall meeting. If you think you will be able to recruit 100 people to come to the meeting, don't pick a room that holds more than 100. Nothing worse than a great turnout dwarfed by a room that could hold 2 or 3 times more people. If you expect a big crowd arrange for a sound system.

Decide which topics to cover in testimony. For example:

1. Why cutting the Pentagon budget can be done now.
2. Testimony on the impact of cutting public services in our community: on seniors, teachers, parents, the homeless, etc.
3. Description of the bills or actions you want the legislators to take. (This works best if accompanied by a written handout that people can take with them.)

Invite people to testify especially those who will suffer the most, if we do not change national spending priorities from wars and weapons to fund jobs and human services. Co-sponsoring groups can divide up topics to cover.

It's important to be realistic about the time for testimony. The entire Town Hall meeting, including questions and discussion, should not last more than 2 hours.

(Continued on reverse)

Do publicity for the Town Hall meeting. A poorly attended meeting can communicate to the elected officials that our cause has little support.

Produce and distribute a posters and leaflets.

Send e-mail, making use of list serves, social media and snail mail.

Make phone calls.

Get listed in community calendars

Send out a press advisory. Follow up with calls to ask the media to cover the event.

Select a moderator, who has the skill to move the town hall meeting along; who is able to cut off long-winded testimony, deal with hecklers or opponents with humor and ease. And is able to adjust the times to accommodate unexpected shifts in the program. Make sure to have a timekeeper to assist the moderator.

Possible program for the event:

- **Welcome and introduction of event and elected official(s) 5 minutes**
- **Prepared Testimony 40 minutes**
- **Audience Testimony: "open mic" with each person limited to 2 minutes. 40 minutes**
- **Elected official testimony 20 minutes**
- **Closing summary of the meeting and next steps in the campaign 5 minutes**

On the night of the town meeting: set up with a large banner with your meeting theme, a registration table for sign in and literature tables. Start and end the meeting on time!

Thanks to Upper Hudson Peace Action, NYS for the material. <http://peaceact.net/organizing-tools/organizing-tips-2/>