



Conducting a Town Hall Meeting in Your Community

The phrase "town hall meeting" gets applied to almost any public meeting these days. However, town hall meetings have a long tradition in America and have a specific purpose and history. A true town hall meeting is where people show up to discuss issues, come up with a solution and possibly vote on policies. People expect to be able to talk at these events. If you're organizing it, don't plan on having a series of speakers. Town hall meetings are meant to involve everybody—you can't script them.

To help you get started on planning your town hall, the National Apartment Association has outlined some basic key steps and considerations.

Step One: Form a Planning Committee

A good way to maximize the impact of your event on people in your community is to form partnerships to plan it and carry it out. These relationships will raise the profile of the event and increase public awareness and attention. All planning partners and supporters should be publicly recognized as sponsors of the event. Work with NAA to help you identify possible partners in your community. It is helpful to recruit your planning committee as early as possible. They will help plan, manage and promote the event.

Step Two: Understand the Unique Characteristics of Your Community

Before organizing your town hall, you must first have a strong understanding of your community's unique issues and challenges. Review local data from a variety of sources and develop a community profile based on solid research. This information will help you know how to focus the discussion and give your presentation credibility. For example, it is important to understand the demographics, distinct culture, governing structure, and building codes and opportunities to help your community.

Step Three: Identify Objectives No two town hall meetings are alike.

Your meeting's content, format and objectives will depend on its particular concerns and needs. For example, your objective could be to inform families and residents about upcoming properties and building codes and standards while other communities may want their town hall meeting to be a forum for a call to action on upcoming legislative bills.



Step Four: Determine Format

Your format will depend on what you are trying to achieve. One of the most common formats is a briefing with a three-or four-person panel of experts and a moderator. The panel discussion typically lasts from 30-45 minutes and the Q&A lasts no more than 30 minutes. The public and policymakers are the primary audience for this type of town hall.

Another format is a media roundtable. Two to four panelists who bring different viewpoints to the issue that you have decided to feature. They have a moderated discussion designed to highlight the issue and then take questions from reporters. Reporters are the primary audience for a media roundtable.

A third format is a policy panel. At a policy panel, the public presents their opinions. The panel members are community leaders, who receive testimony from residents. Speakers give their accounts and urge the panelists to adopt certain measures or recommendations. For this format, the policy panel can convene after the meeting and issue its findings or recommendations based on what they have learned from the public.

Town Hall Meeting Checklist 9

- ✓ Choose an issue/topic 9 Select the place, date and time
- ✓ Identify and invite panelists
- ✓ Select a moderator or facilitator
- ✓ Prepare panelists and media spokespeople
- ✓ Staff your event 9 Prepare materials to distribute on-site
- ✓ Promote your event through the media, social media, newspaper, posting flyers, etc.
- ✓ Create media kits
- ✓ Set up room: sign-in table/hand-outs/etc.
- ✓ Conduct debrief after meeting

If You Have Questions About Town Hall Meetings:

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