

TOWNHALL MEETINGS AMERICAN STYLE



Representative Democracy Means Being
Accessible and Accountable to Your
Constituents – How better to show that than
through Town Hall Meetings?

There is no substitute for good planning



- Adequate advance notice
– not postage stamp size
- Appropriate room size
- Facilitator or other presenters?
- Ability to hear - microphone
- Adequate chairs
- Tables – yes or no?
- Restrooms/water fountain
- A room clock clearly visible to all
- Whiteboard or easel?

Start and end on time

- Pre-town hall meeting activity can set the tone
- You can't control the weather, the traffic, the size of the crowd (or not) and who comes with signs outside of the meeting
- You can control starting on time, showing respect to those who came and worth noting as you begin that you are starting on time and why
- Clearly lay out the rules for the meeting – civility and fairness to all, whether signs allowed or not, Q&A, if you'll stay after, etc.
- Ending on time also shows respect and legitimately provides a way to control run- on audience members



What (Who) are you there for?



This isn't a time for stump speeches.

Be prepared for the wrath of your constituents, if you choose to ignore them.

This time, it really isn't all about you.

TOPIC SIDEBOARDS...to use or not to use?

- Make it clear from the start what the topics will be and whether you're open to veering off that or not
- If you want to stay on select topics only, then give a concrete suggestion on how they reach you on the topics not to be covered at the town hall
- Plan ahead on how you'll handle Q & A, announce it at the beginning of the Q & A and stick with that approach e.g. how much time available overall and whether there are limits per question and/or per person
- Be pleasant, but firm with "rule breakers" and enlist help from others, e.g. host organizer, staff, whomever, if needed – plan ahead so you and others know the appropriate course to take – reduce surprises!

Your Communicating Style

- Style of Dress
- Tone of Voice
- Facial Expressions
- Body Posture
- Know yourself and your personal hot buttons to avoid trips and traps



How to read your audience and what to do about it

- Discretion is the better part of valor – humor, but not sarcasm, can help
- If you mention a questioner's obviously unhappy body language, you open the dialogue up to a more personal level that you may soon regret
- Find a way for everyone to stay on topic



How tightly do you try to control the room?



- Acknowledge what the audience members are, but without losing control of the conversation
- Remind people how much time you all have in the meeting overall
- Remember who this town hall is for and why – it can also win you a lot of support if you handle it well – empathetic listening is critically important.

Extras

- Handouts?
- Your business cards w/contact info?
- Sign up sheets? – if so, be clear about what you plan to do with their personal information, if asked for and provided
- Refreshments? May lead to expectation that you'll stick around for more questions, so be ready to do that or be clear that you can't stick around.

Wrapping it up, thanking everyone for participating in American democracy, no matter how contentious it may have gotten.

