

# Attending Town Hall Meetings

A **town hall meeting** is an informal public meeting. Everybody in a community is invited to attend, voice their opinions and hear the responses from policymakers. Below are tips to make your visit a success!

- **Be Prepared.** Most people don't present their policymakers with a well-researched, well-rehearsed pitch. They just say what they think — which has value. But those who come to town hall meetings with thoughtful arguments, good data and persuasive stories always get remembered.
- **Tell a Personal Story.** This is why policymakers hold town hall meetings — to get first-hand accounts of the impact of policies on constituents. Think in advance of how a policy might affect you, your family, your business or your community. Whether the policymaker supports you or not, they want to hear your story.
- **Use Numbers if You Have Them.** Policymakers live for one thing: 50% plus 1. This keeps them re-elected and in a job. Nearly every person to come before a policymaker represents more constituents either by a class or as a spokesperson. Use these numbers. “I have 50 employees,” “I represent 100 people in my coalition,” “There are 500 people in my community that think just like me.” The policymaker is trying to do the political math the minute you stand up — make it easy for him or her.
- **Be Respectful.** You'd be surprised how many people start a conversation with “I pay your salary so you better listen to me.” It doesn't matter if you're talking to your grocer or a public official — starting any conversation with another person in a rude manner is no way to persuade them. Policymakers want to hear your views, you don't need to badger them to get your message through.
- **Go in Groups.** Nothing says “listen to me” to a policymaker like large group. A chorus is better than a solo performance.

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- ♦ **Talk to the Staff.** Every policymaker brings staff to town hall meetings. They may seem to blend into the woodwork, but a sharp citizen seeks them out. Talk to them before the meeting, get their business cards and tell them your story.
- ♦ **Leave Paper.** Town hall meetings are usually staffed by district-office staff who do not deal with legislative issues on a daily basis. If you leave background memos or talking points, they'll likely be faxed to Washington to the legislative assistant who covers your issue.
- ♦ **Follow Up Politely.** Politely persistent people persuade policymakers. Policymaker's offices are often harried, so they often respond to the squeaky wheel — the person who follows up with a phone call after attending a town hall meeting.
- ♦ **Get People to Multiple Meetings.** This is a sure bet to get noticed. When policymakers get the same questions at different meetings, they say, "We'd better look into that." Hearing the same thing in different places signals to a policymaker there may be a deeper problem afoot.
- ♦ **Demonstrate You're Not Going Away.** If you continue to show your presence at town hall meetings, the policymaker must deal with you. . .if only to avoid an uncomfortable encounter at a future town hall meeting.

## Raising a Question at the Town Hall Meeting

Do not underestimate the power of raising a question at a town hall meeting and getting a public official on the record. If a policymaker says to a constituent in a public setting, "I'll look into it," the issue is guaranteed to immediately go to the top of some staffer's to-do list. Politicians are terrified of being accused of not following through on a promise. And a policymaker making a pledge to a constituent at a town hall meeting is one of the biggest promises they can make.