USE YOUR VOICE TO SHAPE THE FUTURE

How to set up and host town halls

Purpose:

Town halls are an opportunity to engage directly with the community, listen to concerns, share information, and build relationships. They provide a platform to educate attendees on key issues, gather feedback, and strengthen trust between organizers and the public.

Core Principles:

Accessibility: Ensure the event is welcoming & inclusive (location, time, language, physical access).
Transparency: Be clear about the purpose and agenda upfront.
Respect: Foster a safe, respectable place for all voices.
Engagement: Encourage participation through questions, feedback, and action steps.
Follow-through: Commit to next steps & communicate outcomes after the event.

Basic Flow:

Plan & Prepare

Choose a date, time, and venue working for your audience.
Confirm speakers, facilitators, and support roles.
Arrange materials and technology.

Promote

Spread the word via social media, email, flyers, and community partners.
Offer registration if useful (helps estimate attendees).

Set up

Arrive early to set up seating, microphones, materials, and welcome area.
Have sign-in sheets and feedback forms ready.

Facilitate

Welcome attendees, review agenda, and ground rules.
Present the main topic(s).
Open the floor for Q&A and dialogue
Close with next steps and thank everyone for participating

Follow up

Send thank you notes or emails.
Share outcomes, notes, or next steps publicly.
Debrief with your team

Source: The WA-SEN Guidebook, available from wa-sen.org

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Pro Tips:

- Assign a calm, confident moderator to guide the conversation, keep time, and diffuse tension if needed.
- Have an offering available (DoorDash Codes, Snacks/Food/Drink options)
- Prepare answers to tough questions ahead of time and have someone take notes so nothing gets missed.
- Consider live streaming or recording for those who can't attend in person.
- Conduct a run-through meeting prior to the event, so everyone knows what to do and you can test technical systems.

You will need:

Agenda
Outreach email
Flyer
Ground rules for the discussion
Checklist of materials and setup needs
    Make sure to have all printouts ready in time for the event
    Ensure you have proper working speakers, microphones, technology access
Links to virtual platforms and tools for hybrid events
    Consider platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, etc.