

How to Hold a Public Meeting

Public meetings are a good way to bring a community together to share information, increase awareness and gain consensus. At some point in your career, you will have to seek public approval for a major project or provide information during a difficult event (e.g. emergency situations).

While holding a public meeting can be challenging, with careful planning and preparation, you can have a successful and important meeting. Here are some ideas to help.

Guidance on Successful Meetings:

When planning a public meeting, consider the following guidance and use the check boxes if they help you track your tasks:

What & Why – Clearly identify why you are holding the meeting. Write out the reasons, so you can refer to it as you prepare for the meeting.

- Proposal – Determine what information needs to be presented. If you are using a consultant, work together on the information that will be presented. Make the presentation materials clear and concise.
- Rate Increase – If the reason for the meeting is that there will be a rate increase, attendees will need to know why there will be an increase and if there are options for a rate structure or payment option. Show why the increase is needed and where the money will be spent.
- Emergency Issue or update – During an emergency situation, people need clear information and direction. Choose the information that will help them make a decision and take action. If there will be information that is not yet available, tell them when you expect to have the information and how that will be relayed to them once it is available.

When – Be precise and transparent about the details of the meeting:

- Date/Time – Consider a date and time when you anticipate the majority of the community member can attend.
- Venue – Book a venue. Ensure the venue is large enough to seat the expected number of attendees, or have a back-up location if more people than anticipated sign up.
- Promote the Meeting – Publicize the meeting widely via phone, mail/email notification, social media, community notice boards and your website, as many options as you have available.
- Speakers – Ensure speakers, consultants or facilitators have advance notice, so they can prepare their presentation material and arrange to attend the meeting.

How – A successful meeting is a prepared meeting

- Agenda – Provide a meeting agenda at the door or before the meeting starts. This will help inform attendees and speakers on the order of business. Try to keep the meeting agenda time to less than 2 hours.
- Materials – Ensure you have materials to display or handouts you can refer to during your meeting.
- Set up – Arrive early to set up for the meeting. This will allow you time to organize any displays, greet attendees and ensure attendees have any handouts or agendas.
- Meeting Pointers –
 - Start the meeting on time.
 - Introduce yourself, panel members and speakers.
 - Introduce the agenda items.
 - Meetings can sometime get off topic. Stick to the topics on the meeting agenda. Provide a ‘parking lot’ for items that are brought up during the meeting so you can address them at another time.
 - Let attendees know how they can ask questions. Some facilitators prefer questions to be asked at the end of the meeting, while others prefer that questions be asked after panel members have provided information on the agenda.
 - If there might be disruptive community members in attendance, consider using a professional facilitator, like a regional district director, to help facilitate the meeting. Use the ‘parking lot’ concept to capture the individual’s concern and invite people to add their comments after the meeting.
 - Finish the meeting on time. Invite attendees to ask question after the meeting. Provide a date for a next meeting (if necessary) or a location to find updates on the project.

How to Handle Disruptive Attendees:

- Do not challenge the disruptive person. This can lead to emotional grand standing.
- Use the ‘parking lot’ to record their issue so it can be discussed later.
- Consider addressing their question and then invite them to speak to you or your speakers later.
- Facilitation: If the meeting will be controversial or emotionally charged consider using a professional facilitator or local regional district director.
- Alternatively: Consider presenting first, then offering breakout sessions so attendees can ask questions privately or individually.