
A Powerful Force: A Guide to Youth-Led Town Hall Meetings

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Why Partner With Youth for a Town Hall Meeting?	1
Specific Ways Youth Contribute to Town Hall Meetings	2
The Effective Town Hall Meeting	3
Types of Prevention.....	3
Actions vs. Activities	3
Planning For Action—The Big Picture	4
Five Steps of Action Planning	5
Planning a Town Hall Meeting — The Event	6
Before Your Town Hall Meeting	6
During Your Town Hall.....	13
<i>Your Agenda:</i>	14
<i>Documentation</i>	16
After Your Town Hall	16
<i>Evaluation</i>	16
<i>Next Steps: Who’s Doing What, When?</i>	17
<i>Follow Up: Say Thank You!</i>	17
<i>Team Debrief</i>	17

A Powerful Force: A Guide to Youth-Led Town Hall Meetings

Introduction

Every 2 years since 2006, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), part of the Department of Health and Human Services, has sponsored nationwide town hall meetings¹ to prevent underage drinking. These events may be called by other names, such as public forums or community conversations, and they may be virtual or in-person. Their goal, however, is always the same—to be a catalyst for action against a public health problem that affects millions of youth, families, and communities.

This guide is intended to support youth and adults working together to plan and conduct an effective Town Hall Meeting to prevent underage drinking. Youth groups who have held SAMHSA-sponsored events include California Friday Night Live, Students Against Destructive Decisions, 4-H, faith based groups and more.

Why Partner With Youth for a Town Hall Meeting?

Youth themselves can be a powerful force for underage drinking prevention. Young people often know far better than adults:

- How prevalent alcohol use is among their peers
- Reasons why their peers might drink
- What changes to the drinking environment could reduce the risk

"We have seen the power of youth engaged in the planning and implementation of the town hall meetings, creating an environment where youth and adults work together to make their communities better places to live."

- Dr. Jim Kooler, Administrator for the California Friday Night Live Partnership

Their unique perspective on the problem provides a powerful credibility that can really grab the attention of community stakeholders. They can be an unexpected voice, with an unexpected message.

¹ Town Hall Meetings is a generic term used in this document to refer to public events that seek to promote solutions to the problem of underage drinking. For more information about underage drinking prevalence and solutions, visit www.StopAlcoholAbuse.gov.

Friday Night Live Middle School students in Contra Costa, California are a good example:

STOP THE alcoPOPS

Concerned youth members designed a campaign to highlight how the alcohol industry attempts to hide the alcohol in the flavored malt beverages. They creatively imaged the concept by using the lower case alco and uppercase POPS – alcoPOPS. They designed posters as part of their effort to reduce the availability and access and began engaging the community in environmental prevention to reduce underage drinking.

After launching their campaign, they decided to pursue a Deemed Approved Ordinance to give both the city and county the authority to restrict the sale of the alcoPOPS. After meetings with individual policy makers and presentations to City Councils and Board of Supervisors, they were successful in their policy effort at the county level as well as several cities, to date.

The taste of success inspired them to push further. They met with their State Assembly-member and asked for three things: testing of alcopops for distilled spirits, eliminate single serving alcopops, and regulate product placement. If meeting with their State Assembly member was not enough, they met with their Congressman and asked him to regulate the way the products are designed and marketed as well as increase the tax on alcopops.

A comment by one of the Club Live members sums up their experience: “Being part of this experience has given me hope for my future and my community”.

When young people have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the community and be involved in positive relationships with adults, they can benefit in a number of ways, such as by strengthening their communication and leadership skills and taking shared ownership of their community. Adults also benefit, such as gaining new perspectives and ideas about the issue or work and connecting to an important community demographic. The community benefits from a shared vision and voice, collective ownership of the issues, and having skilled young people contribute to the community’s well being over both the short- and long term.

Specific Ways Youth Contribute to Town Hall Meetings

Young people are a valuable resource with significant contributions to offer. It is important that youth are not just given tasks, but are provided with authentic opportunities to inform the process.

- Designing surveys based on problem issues known to youth, such as parent provision of alcohol, low enforcement of ID checks, etc.
- Collecting data from their peers (large sampling will require pre-approval of a school system or other body that ensures the privacy and protection of young people)
- Providing a personal voice to community discussions
- Developing skits or videos for the event
- Developing and conducting a social media plan
- Co-facilitating the event
- Developing youth perspective talking points / questions

The Effective Town Hall Meeting

Effective town hall meetings are solution-focused, meaning that the desired outcome is to identify or build community support for a research-based prevention effort. Effective events also are part of a larger process and not stand-alone events. More information about each of these characteristics follows.

Types of Prevention

There are basically two underage drinking prevention targets:

1. **Individual** - prevention focuses on changing the attitudes and choices that people make as individuals by encouraging them to make healthier choices. Classroom presentations, public service announcements, and “Just Say No” type campaigns are examples.
2. **Environmental** - prevention focuses on reducing, changing or eliminating the negative factors in an environment that contribute to unhealthy attitudes and behaviors by a population at large. The four primary and overlapping factors are:
 1. *Norms* — What is considered to be acceptable or “normal” behavior in one’s environment (family, peers, etc.).
 2. *Media Messages* — Messages that an individual is exposed to through channels such as television, radio, billboards, and magazines.
 3. *Laws, Rules and Policies* — The rules that exist and whether they are enforced or not.
 4. *Access* — where, how, and when young people access alcohol.

Environmental prevention is based on identifying the root causes of the identified problem(s) and implementing solutions that are intended to be long term and sustainable.

Actions vs. Activities

Town hall meetings take significant planning and effort, which is why you don’t want it to be just an activity, but also want it to result in a desired action that will reduce underage drinking. This example will help illustrate the difference.

You have data that tells you that it is a root cause of several problems that you have identified. You invite the mayor, the chief of police and several young people to sit on a panel to talk about the problem. You have a great PowerPoint presentation that shows your data and a nice handout that illustrates the problem as well. You have invited the media and sent out a well-written press release. You have child-care. You have cookies.

This town hall meeting model focuses on the individual, not the environment. People will have more information about the problem; they may even change a behavior as a result of what they have learned. But any impact to the problem will depend on the individuals who attended your

town hall meeting to change their behavior. Your chances of making a significant impact on the issue you are seeking to change, are pretty small.

What the model just described is lacking is a call to action. What do you want people to do about the problem you have so thoroughly described? How can your audience get involved in the solution—specifically?

Your town hall meeting should result in an action that takes you one step closer to your goal. Actions seek to change the environment in which the problem itself exists (as opposed to changing the person). Actions are also designed to build the power of the group to take future actions and address other problems.

Planning For Action—The Big Picture

How do you make sure your town hall meeting isn't just a one-day event? How do you make sure that young people have meaningful representation and partnership? The key to both is working together, from the beginning, to focus on an event that fits into the long-term goal of what your organization or group is working to accomplish. Engaging youth as partners in the bigger picture of community change can help ensure that the event is part of a larger goal and that youth are full partners in that vision. Having a process that can create a common vision creates a common ground for all partners; youth and adults alike. Action planning can help. Action planning is the cyclical process that supports groups in identifying the problems/concerns they want to address in their community, and work to develop a plan to affect community-wide change.

Action planning can create a critical foundation that will help to make your Town Hall meeting a success, because it takes a group from identifying a problem and then provides a process through which they become more knowledgeable about this area. It also provides a step-by-step description of the strategy a group will use to accomplish their larger goal. This plan will help ensure that you stay on course and make it much more likely that you will reach your goal.

Moving forward, think back to the discussion about environmental prevention factors and the need to change the conditions or **root causes** that grow into social problems. If we only work to eliminate the symptoms, there is a good chance they will return. It be might helpful to think about this in real-life terms: There is a problem with youth drinking at football games at the local high school. Alcohol isn't allowed on school grounds or at the stadium, but adults bring it in coolers and other containers and over the years, it has become normal for adults to drink at the games. Youth are also sneaking in alcohol and consuming it during the game. There are fights among the youth and sometimes even the adults - behavior in general is poor. There has been more than one DUI after the games and sometimes the visiting teams complain. Trashcans and litter under the bleachers give evidence to the fact that alcohol is being

consumed. The school board knows it a problem and wants to do something about it. The board has several ideas:

1. They could organize parents into teams and take turns picking up the litter after the games.
2. They could post security guards to prevent fights.
3. They could organize 'safe rides' home from the game.
4. They could implement a policy that prohibits outside containers from being brought into the stadium.
5. They could hire security to inspect fans belongings as they enter the stadium.

Picking up the trash (1), preventing fights and organizing safe rides only addresses the symptoms (litter under the bleachers, fights and DUIs). Options 4 and 5 address the root cause and have a much better shot at sustainable change.

Five Steps of Action Planning

Action planning involves the five basic stages that follow.

Stage 1: Identify the Problems — This stage is about choosing which problem you will focus on. By deciding to have a town hall meeting, you may have already done this. However, problem identification may be a good starting point because it creates rich opportunities for young people to have a better sense of what is truly occurring in the community. It can also help youth and adults learn about setting priorities (by having to choose from a range of problems they face). In addition, thoughtful problem identification will increase your chance for success and addressing community needs in a meaningful way.

Stage 2: Investigation and Analysis — This stage is really about sorting through the different approaches that can be taken to understand a problem more completely. This includes talking about it in-depth among your group and going outside your group to collect information about the problem.

Specific methods include: doing journal/book and Internet research; talking to experts or those already doing something about the problems; observing what goes on around you; collecting survey data, holding hearings or forums; and doing interviews and focus groups. Research is critical for the obvious reason—the more you know about a problem or issue, the better you'll be able to understand possible solutions.

Good research helps you understand root causes, who and how the problem is having an impact; and what actions others have tried or what might work. Also, research enables young people to develop deeper connections with and understandings of their peers, their community and themselves.

Stage 3: Choose Actions — Use your research to help you identify different courses of actions you propose during a town hall meeting and what these various options realistically entail. If, for example, your research suggests that many alcohol outlets are not checking IDs before alcohol sales, then more compliance checks appear to be a solution. Some states, however,

have significant restrictions on the use of compliance checks. Carrying out the compliance checks requires more enforcement action. Responsible beverage service training is another option. Be prepared to back up any community discussion about options with factors that influence implementation.

Creating a structured process to generate and select an action provides an excellent opportunity to consider a variety of approaches to dealing with selected problems or issues. This process provides opportunities for youth to move beyond basic educational events, like health fairs, and towards those they have not have been traditionally exposed to or encouraged to consider, like policy advocacy or mobilization.

Stage 4: Create an Action Plan — Arguably the most challenging and important part of creating an action plan is identifying the steps, actions or tasks that, when put together, over a certain time period create a successful effort or campaign. An action plan also includes strategies to deal with challenges or barriers to success, and ways to use internal and external resources to address these challenges.

Creating a road map for taking action helps group members break down complex elements into manageable chunks; track progress in taking action; build experience in accountability and responsibility; and help ensure that youth involvement in the process is authentic and that they are engaged in all aspects of planning.

Stage 5: Reflect and Evaluate — Often regarded as an afterthought, reflection and evaluation are vital parts to the action planning process. This stage requires that a group consider what strategies it used, what (goals) were actually accomplished, and where it should go next. Regardless of the extent of planning and the place where they started, taking action offers important opportunities for learning and growth for participants and for the future work of the group. In community change processes, intentional reflection is key to ensuring the work is sustainable and has a longer-term impact.

Keep in mind that intensive, action planning is not meant to be linear. You can be at one stage of the cycle and move to another; then back again – especially if you are evaluating your steps as you go. It is meant to be a fluid set of guidelines to help you plan, implement, evaluate and make change!

Planning a Town Hall Meeting — The Event

At this point, you know the issue you want to address at your town hall meeting. To get the most out of your effort, consider your town hall meeting from three different perspectives: before, during, and after.

Before Your Town Hall Meeting

An important element to the success of your town hall meeting, and even your larger community change effort, will be your vision of how your event will get you closer to your goal. When your event is complete and the thank you notes have been sent, what will remain? Do you have commitments from policy makers to support a social host ordinance? Do you have

contact info for community members willing to support your policy effort? Do you have stakeholders that are committing to a long-term campaign for change? These are all desired outcomes. They are usually the product of deliberate actions, with an eye on the larger goal.

Determine Outcomes — The most critical step in the *before* phase is to decide what outcomes you would like to achieve from your town hall meeting. Most of your other decisions will be based upon this one. It is important that both youth and adults have an opportunity to weigh in on this aspect and there is mutual understanding and agreement about the direction of the effort.

Your outcomes should be *specific, attainable* and *measurable* - it might help to think about that as **SAM**. You want them to be to the point so everyone understands where you are headed.

Specific — Outcomes are clear-cut and to the point, without leaving a lot of room for interpretation. Being specific can really be helpful in making decisions as a group as it can filter out some of the personal bias we all bring to these kinds of decisions.

Attainable — Outcomes should be attainable. As complex as community change work can be, it is important to be clear on the long-term goals you are working toward, as well as how your town hall meeting is going to help get you there.

Measurable — Setting measurable outcomes tends to be more difficult, but it can be very helpful to develop objectives that you can measure in some way. This accomplishes two different things:

- i. Achieving these objectives helps all attendees of the town hall meeting—including speakers—leave the event with a better feeling of accomplishment.
- ii. Quantifying outcomes makes it possible to use your town hall meeting results in other documents, such as grant applications or reports, where you may need to quantify what you have done.

Think beyond measures like the number of people who attended. Stronger measures of your meeting’s effectiveness could include the number of people joining your task force after the town hall meeting or the percentage of people who respond to a survey question about new knowledge gain. With mutually agreed upon outcomes in place, everyone has a common vision of what should be achieved. These outcomes will be a good reference point for other decisions that will need to be made along the way. Being able to answer the question, “Will this speaker, agenda, idea or talking point play a role in getting to our outcome?” If the answer is yes, carry on. If the answer is no, you will want to revisit the idea or concept you are considering.

Identify the Audience — Keeping in mind the outcomes that you want to achieve, who do you want to reach with your message? While town hall meetings are community events, targeting a particular audience may be helpful in getting to your outcome. People who are directly

impacted by the issue itself are always a good place to start. (This includes people with the power to make decisions that impact the issue). If you host a town hall meeting to talk about youth access to alcohol, you would probably want to invite parents, youth, retail merchants, law enforcement, policy makers, etc. Teachers and school administrators often feel and see the impact of underage drinking as well.

Thinking about your event in that way may make it clearer as to whom the audience should be. Who you determine your audience to be, will play a significant role in the other items on your 'before' list. Where and when you hold the town hall meeting, what your message is and who delivers it, will all be influenced by who your audience is and what outcomes you wish to achieve.

Determine When — If deciding when to host your town hall meeting, try to avoid conflicts with other regularly scheduled group meetings in the area, like youth and school events, holidays or other local events. While thinking about what holidays to avoid, you might also consider what events or observances you might want to coincide with. For example National Alcohol Awareness month in April, SHAMSA's National Prevention Week in May or you might even consider your event as a "counter" to holidays that have become known for drinking like St. Patrick's Day or Cinco de Mayo. Also along the lines of timing, you may want to consider the opportunity to educate parents during times or periods that youth may be more likely to drink, such as June and July or first drinks during school breaks such as winter and spring.

What time you hold the event will be important too. During the day limits the ability of many people with 8-5 jobs or youth in school from participating-usually not recommended. Early evening can mean people need childcare or dinner or both. Consider what you want to provide and how it will inform the attendance of your target audience if you do/don't.

Identify Where & How — As with most event planning, you want to secure a location that is as accessible and neutral for as much of the community as possible (remember your intended audience!). When choosing a location, think about these questions:

- *Accessibility:* How close is the venue to forms of public transportation and/or does it provide parking? Is the venue physically accessible to community members who use wheelchairs or have other mobility needs? Is it possible to arrange for a language interpreter during the town hall meeting? Are there places to post large signs or other materials to assist people who rely on visual aids?
- *Layout:* Does it have adequate seating and space as well as access to electrical outlets for equipment? Is there room to move around or tables for groups to gather/work if needed? Where will speakers sit, stand while speaking or waiting to speak?
- Is the venue youth-friendly? Is it friendly at all? (Check out things such as natural lighting, the color and layout of the room, etc.). Capacity is particularly important if you

are hosting a town hall meeting on an issue that can divide communities, such as school policies related to athlete alcohol use, policies that impact businesses or any policies that may impact widely accepted community norms.

Think outside of the box...

Just because it is a town hall meeting, doesn't mean it has to take place in a hall or even a building. Think about how technology might allow you to reach the community in non-traditional ways. Televising it through local cable channels and creating call-in opportunities, broadcasting it on the radio or through computer aided options like webcasts.

Another key piece is identifying point people. This helps to specifically map out who is responsible for what and when. Make sure you also consider how people will flow through the event. Be sure to answer/prepare for the following:

1. How will you know who is there?:

Hint: registration tables with separate areas for each of the following is one way to manage this...

- How will you know when your speakers have arrived (or if one hasn't)?
 - How will you know who is there as a press representative so you can give them a press packet and allow for follow-up?
 - How will you know participating as participants and how can you connect with them later?
2. How will agenda or other documents be disseminated?
 3. What will people need during the event and how will they get it? (ex: markers for group work)
 4. Is it important that people know each other's names? Nametags can add to a feeling of community.
 5. What if more people show up than you have seats for? This is a good problem to have, but a problem nonetheless - have a plan.

Also important to consider, is audio-visual needs. Do you need projectors and screens for PowerPoint presentations, videos or other visuals; Speakers for videos, microphones or music?

It is critical that participants can easily hear and see everything that is being presented. Test EVERYTHING, and then test it again. If by chance you do have a problem at the event, don't panic-roll with it. Have a copy or two of the power-point slides printed, in case you have to read them.

Select Speakers — You're on your way. You've got your issue, outcomes and logistics set. Next, it's time to take a look at potential speakers; brainstorm who can help you strategically engage community members and/or deliver your message. When considering potential speakers, focus on a few key questions about a speaker, such as will this person:

- Attract people to the town hall meeting?

- Add legitimacy to the town hall meeting or larger action (expert, politician, personally affected by issue, etc.)?
- Create added pressure on your target (key decision-maker, community activist etc.)
- Help galvanize more support from other stakeholders (community members, people in power, etc.)?

Choose more than one youth speaker to address the audience. This ensures that the audience has a sense of the community's youth voice, as opposed to a youth from the community.

Develop Talking Points — In addition to the list above, having talking points developed ahead of time for speakers provides a few distinct benefits. First, it ensures that speakers have varied points and don't repeat each other; and second, it can help with overall flow.

Equally important to strategically choosing speakers is the order in which they address the audience. If you have a few key points that you want make sure are emphasized throughout the day, providing these to speakers (both youth and adult) ahead of time will help maintain that theme. In addition, providing talking points to designated speakers ahead of time gives you an opportunity to have your speakers talk to each other and build upon and interact with what the other will say.

Flip the script: If you choose a key decision-maker or other person in power to be a main speaker for your town hall meeting, have youth partners write her/his talking points. If we're really talking about community change through youth-adult partnerships, we need to advocate for and with young people's voices as much as possible.

Design the Agenda — Designing your agenda will have a large part to do with the speakers you plan to have, as well as how you plan to engage the audience. One of the benefits for choosing town hall meeting as the Environmental Prevention strategy you use is the potential for both collecting community data as well as building your base/garnering more support for your larger action.

The Moderator is a key role you should plan for when it comes to addressing the audience. A moderator's role is to welcome everyone, make introductions, explain the agenda, facilitate any Q & A session and help with transitions. This person should be well versed in the issue area, the larger action, and the community itself because of the likelihood that unanticipated questions or challenges may arise.

When considering how to best engage the community members attending your town hall meeting, think of strategies that really connect with the experience and expertise in the room. Interactive activities like small group work (where smaller groups of people give feedback or discuss a certain question), open discussion facilitation and Question & Answer periods (particularly helpful after hearing speakers or to give personal testimony) are all great ways of engaging town hall meeting attendees. Everything above will aid you in structuring your

agenda. You can use the flow chart below to get a general sense of time and flow. You can also find a sample agenda in the Toolbox.

Press Conference (optional) — Consider whether or not you want to conduct a press conference before or after your event. A press conference is a short (30 minute or less) process that allows media representatives to hear 1-2 minute statements from key stakeholders (including youth) involved in your effort. The press often uses these statements for sound bites in video news coverage. After three to four speakers make statements, you can open the floor for media to ask questions. This gives the media a good opportunity to capture photos and footage and gather specific statements to utilize in their coverage of the event. There are both pros and cons to adding this element.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It gives media an easy, efficient way to cover your issue, increasing your opportunity to get attention. – Because they are assured the opportunity to get statements from key community members, they are more likely to attend. – It gives you an opportunity to be prepared for media statements; organizing who will say what, etc. Youth may feel more confident addressing the media when given support and opportunities to practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It adds an extra element of planning and preparation that you may not be ready for.

Regardless of whether or not you decide to add a press conference, you should have press packets prepared.

Publicize! Publicize! Publicize!... And then publicize some more! — We’ve all been to a great event that had low-turnout due to poor publicizing. If people don’t know about your town hall meeting, they definitely will not be attending-you can count on that. Publicizing far enough in advance and in strategic places can be the key to spreading the word, ensuring a great turnout at your town hall meeting. Again, it is key to think about your intended audience, including youth, parents/primary caregivers, teachers and school administrators.

Ask questions like, where does your intended audience get its information? Local radio stations, newspapers and other media outlets can be great helps in this area, not to mention potential allies for your action. Make sure you access media in other language spoken by members of your community – this really helps connect your event with the intended audience!

Youth partners will have some very specific expertise in getting the word out, not only to other youth, but also to community members using social media. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and SnapChat are a few of the current platforms available for sharing ideas and information. Which

of these is the most predominate varies from community to community and even from school to school. Use what you think will work and embrace the opportunity to learn and utilize a new platform as well. You may also want to consider asking community organizations to share your invitation, using their own e-mail lists (an email list of recipients that they regularly send information to) and social media pages.

Another helpful hint when publicizing is obtaining co-sponsors. Co-sponsoring basically means helping publicize the meeting. There is no money involved or exchanged. You want co-sponsors because it shows that you have a broad coalition. Also, it will help boost attendance at your town hall meeting, which could apply political pressure to a decision-maker. Think broadly! Possible co-sponsors should include natural allies like other youth or social change groups, but also reach out to faith-based groups, civic groups, labor unions and local businesses; the object is to build a broad coalition with diverse endorsements. Remember, if it is just youth groups supporting your effort, the decision-maker or other key constituents will probably not be impressed. Try to make them say, “Wow! Everybody wants me to support this.” Refer to the Toolbox for *Tips to Secure Co-Sponsors*.

Personal Invitations — Identify those that you think might be helpful to have in your audience. Specific stakeholders whose support you would like to gain, those who might have influence over stakeholders (including the media) and others that you think would benefit from your message or supporting your cause.

Send personal invitations via email, personal delivery or in the mail. A quick phone call can be helpful too. Remember, the people in the audience can be just as important to the effort as those up in front. Be thoughtful about who that should be and put some effort into getting them there. Don’t just hope they hear about it.

Media Advisory — This is a specific kind of invitation that you will want to use to get the media to show up. Media is a *very important* aspect of your town hall meeting. They have the potential to carry your message far beyond the event itself.

A media advisory is different from a press release. The media advisory is the ‘heads up’ that you send to media outlets to let them know when and where event is happening and why it’s important. You will follow up with a press release to provide more detail about the event on the day of the event. There are examples of both of these documents in the Toolbox.

You are on your way! Check out the next sections for tips on how to make the most of your town hall meeting during the event.

During Your Town Hall

You have planned well and you should have everything ready to go on the day of your event. Impressions count, so make sure that your audience and invited guests see and organized, well thought-out event. Start early and be prepared well before the scheduled start time.

Manage Logistics — This includes organizing any volunteers, speakers, room set-up and checking on any technical needs or run-throughs.

Some specific things to remember include:

- Designate point people for each area
- Designate a point person for volunteers and speakers so they can easily obtain directions, seating assignments, etc.
- Run through agenda, using 'live' sound and actual positioning
- Make sure that entrance to the meeting is clearly identified and that people know what to do when they get in the door.
- Arrange for a few greeters who welcome people as they enter and are available to answer any questions about logistics (e.g., where to sit and location of restrooms).
- Have a table in a conspicuous location, at which attendees can pick up any materials you have for them, including the agenda, sign-in sheet (including contact information), nametags and background information.
- Convene all speakers (including your moderator) for a check-in prior to the start of your town hall meeting, ensuring clarity on talking points, flow and context.
- How will evaluation documents be disseminated and collected? Have a plan for this and point people to ensure that the process goes as planned.

Remember that there are multiple roles for youth and adult partners to take on: greeters, note takers, speakers, moderators, planted audience members (to prompt questions, spur conversation, etc.).

Press Release — The day before/or very early morning of your event, you should send out your press release. This is the more detailed document that goes beyond the press advisory and includes other important information such as why the event is important, what will happen there, the issue and statistics about the issue. Key quotes, from a couple of diverse experts, including youth, will be helpful too. The key to a good press release is that you give them enough quality information, data and quotes so they can produce an article about your event without having been there.

Your Agenda:

Introductions & Background

The role of the meeting moderator is to serve as both emcee and facilitator, and to maintain the flow of the town hall meeting as planned. Begin by introducing yourself, and give time for others to introduce themselves. It is good to understand what kind of audience you may be interacting with – it may or may not be your intended audience – so ask them to include in their introduction why they have chosen to attend your town hall meeting. Next, provide concise overview as to what you plan to cover in the town hall meeting and your reasons for holding it. Finally, review the planned agenda so that everyone in the room knows what to expect (be sure to include names of any notable speakers or key constituents).

Interactive Activities/Discussion

As mentioned in the *Before Your Town Hall Meeting* section, there are many ways to engage the participants present. Following are some different methods of facilitation and suggestions for structuring this portion of your town hall meeting.

There are various types of discussions that vary from being exclusive to inclusive. It is up to the moderator to ensure that all participants have a fair opportunity and equal amount of time to express themselves. Below is a general range to help guide you.

Exclusive	Partial Collaboration	Inclusive
Only a select few dominate the discussion, their thought and ideas are only heard, while others remain unheard.	People are encouraged to talk, yet some people are taking more time than others, there is still a lack of balance in the distribution of time and ideas shared.	This group discussion includes all participants, allowing for difference of opinions but also trying to reach a consensus.

In your town hall meeting, it is ideal to strive for *inclusive* discussion as much as possible. Earlier we mentioned different types of group engagement: open discussion, small group work, and Q & A periods. If you choose open discussion, you will want to ensure that the moderator is skilled at inclusive facilitation. One way to facilitate the discussion in an inclusive way is to listen to everyone's opinion by going in a complete circle, having people aware of general time restriction. This method can also be applied to smaller group breakouts (with one moderator per group), which could be handy if you have a large turnout.

To help achieve a more inclusive model, the following may be a helpful reference when facilitating this part of your town hall meeting.

The successful, inclusive moderator:

- Does not “lead” the discussion, but helps direct it toward a positive and productive outcome;
- Needs to be clear about the sequence of discussion as well as the set agenda and timeline to ensure there is adequate structure during the town hall meeting, yet also allowing for flexibility where appropriate; and
- Helps channel the issues raised by participants into organized and recorded ideas while encouraging people to share their thoughts and opinions.

Question & Answer Period

A Q&A session is always a useful way to engage your audience. It can provide a platform for personal testimony and can spur questions that may not have been asked during speaker presentations. Here are some general tips for a successful Q & A period.

- Brainstorm ahead of time some potential themes that may arise to help make your Q & A as meaningful as possible.
- Being prepared is key; also allow for some flexibility and fluidity with the agenda. An issue or theme you didn’t think of may be identified by audience members as very important, so you will want to allow for enough flexibility to respond accordingly.
- Build in as many ways to gather feedback as possible. Hand out note cards for audience members to write down questions that occur to them during presentations. If yours is an in-person event, require the use of microphones to ensure voices are heard. Have assigned note takers during the discussion to record themes or questions visually, where everyone can see it.
- Encourage everyone’s participation and remind the group this is an opportunity for discussion on the community issue identified, not to resolve individual issues (*This is particularly important in using your town hall meeting as an environmental prevention strategy to address a community issue!*)
- Open the discussion by identifying someone who wishes to speak or by asking a “prompt” question.
- Direct a question to other speaker/members of the panel or audience members.
- Redirect attention from participants who begin to monopolize the discussion. (*This is particularly important if you have adults and young people in the audience, and adults are dominating the conversation.*)
- Encourage people wishing to engage in continuing discussion about personal needs or issues to delay until after the Q & A are concluded. (*Hint: have a flip chart in a conspicuous place that reads “Parking Lot” on the top, and make sure a volunteer records any lingering issues needing to be revisited.*)

Call to Action, Summary & Reflection

If not already built into the agenda, you will definitely want to wrap up with a large group share-back or review of the issues discussed, or other salient points to highlight. ***Be prepared to make a call to action*** (What do you want people to do next and how can they help?). This will be a critical leveraging point for your effort.

In other words, don't waste this opportunity. If you don't have a specific ask, then ask them to join you in moving forward to address the community change. Give them contact cards to fill out or include it an event evaluation. People should walk out with the knowledge and feeling that the town hall meeting focused more on solutions than a rehash of problems, and they are part of the solution.

The moderator, or other speakers, can ask people to give their reflection and overall thoughts about the town hall meeting, and reaction to possible next steps. Again, keep in mind inclusive facilitation to ensure a diverse array of voice.

Documentation

Documentation is a key factor in determining the success and sustainability of your town hall meeting. This can take multiple forms (audio recordings, video recordings, written notes, etc.) and can take place through the entirety of the town hall meeting or during specific portions only. Also consider providing a documentation sheet that allows participants to identify what sector of the community they are from and pertinent contact information. You may not know how, when or why you might want to connect with a participant later, but this will ensure that when the opportunity arises, your group will be able to refer to this documentation as a useful resource. Refer to the Toolbox for a sample of a *Documentation Sheet*.

Bright Idea! Partner with a local youth media group to document your town hall meeting with individual interviews. Then, turn the raw footage into a short documentary or clips to share on social media. Video is a great way to make the town hall meeting come to life and to reach made more audiences after the event. For more ideas about how to use video and social media, refer to the companion toolkit, *Youth-led Town Hall Meetings Social Media Toolkit*.

After Your Town Hall

Congratulations! You have completed your town hall meeting. Your group should definitely celebrate, but there are other essential follow-up steps that need to be considered.

Evaluation

To assess how valuable the town hall meeting was for the participants, hand out a short evaluation close to the end of the town hall meeting (be sure to allocate time for these final activity). Try to keep your evaluation length to half a page. This evaluation will also provide audience members with an opportunity to record their personal thoughts about their experience. You can include questions such as:

1. What did you learn during this town hall meeting?
2. How likely are you to share this information with others?
3. What do you think were the positive outcomes resulting from this town hall meeting?
What other important considerations should we be thinking about this issue?
4. Are you interested in follow-up work? If so, may we contact you? Please list your contact information here _____.

You may choose to go more in-depth with your evaluation. See the Toolbox for a sample *Town Hall Meeting Evaluation*.

Next Steps: Who's Doing What, When?

Recall Step 4 of Action Planning: creating a road map. If you've already done your homework, you will have a bigger plan that your town hall meeting easily fits into. You presented pieces of that bigger plan and vision to the participants of your town hall meeting. Now that you've had a successful event, engaged your intended audiences, and built some much-needed momentum, you have a great starting point for a new coalition or community group, adding to an existing one, or adding supporters or people willing to participate in aspects of moving your efforts forward. It's time to start plugging in who's doing what, and when!

Drawing from the data and contact information generated at your town hall meeting, create a solid structure that will help you implement next steps. For a comprehensive guide to community action next steps, take a look at the companion toolkit, *Town Hall Meetings and Beyond*.

Follow Up: Say Thank You!

Where applicable, remember to thank everyone who helped make the town hall meeting a success, including any public officials, media or other key constituents who attended.

Team Debrief

Hold a debrief with your youth and adult planners right after the town hall meeting to check in about initial reactions to the day. Another, more in-depth debrief can be done a week or so after your event (this can tie in with following up on next steps!). Check out the Toolbox for *Suggested Debrief Exercises*.

Don't forget to *celebrate*! Often a crucial, but missing step in community change is the celebration and intentional appreciation of moments that help make change a reality. Your town hall meeting may just be one step in your larger action plan and vision for change, but it is an important one. Utilize that positive energy to help you move this great work forward!