



HOW TO PLAN A TOWN HALL MEETING

A **town hall meeting** is a public forum in which a panel of people, including elected and appointed officials, subject matter experts, resource providers, and interested community members, present information on an issue relevant to the community. Careful consideration is given to the selection of panel members in order to provide a balanced, informed perspective on the issue.

With your support, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) can increase community awareness of missing children, and reunite more children with their families. With your voice as an advocate, NCMEC can draw attention to the issues surrounding the abduction and exploitation of children, and decrease the likelihood that these cases will occur. On behalf of the children we serve, thank you for your support.

How Do I Coordinate a Town Hall Meeting?

Though planning a town hall meeting might seem difficult at first, strategic planning and a broad range of community supporters will make your town hall meeting a success. As you begin planning your town hall meeting, consider these steps:

1. **Create a planning committee.** Invite representatives from the nonprofit, corporate, and governmental sectors, in addition to media and faith-based organizations. Be sure to invite police department representatives as well as elected officials. These people will help ensure you have a strong base of support. Divide responsibilities between media outreach, event planning, and programmatic details. Develop a timeline that will guide you in the planning process.
2. **Brainstorm a list of contacts.** Include potential speakers, elected and appointed officials, volunteers, media contacts, and any other community members whose support could be valuable.
3. **Create your meeting strategy.** What are your goals for the meeting? What local programs and resources already exist that help address this issue? Based on your goals and existing programs, what other resources does the community need? How is the issue of missing and exploited children relevant to your local community? What are the local statistics involving missing or exploited children? What is that in relation to national statistics?



HOW TO PLAN A TOWN HALL MEETING (cont.)

4. **Plan the meeting details.** Based on your goals, what speakers should be featured? Where will you hold the event? What materials will you distribute to attendees? What date and time of day will allow for maximum participation? Remember, your venue should be politically neutral, comfortably hold the expected number of attendees, and provide for attendees to park or take public transportation. If your meeting will occur during a time of typically bad weather, remember to have a back-up date and plan.
5. **Develop a media strategy.** Brainstorm a list of media representatives to invite to attend the event. Remember to include television and radio stations, newspapers, and magazines. Don't forget to invite your local cable access channel, your local Public Broadcasting Station, Univision or Telemundo stations, or community newspapers. These can be great outlets for spreading the word, too! Will you create a PSA after the event? Make sure to have someone videotape the entire event for later use. Create a press release to send to each media outlet, along with an invitation to the event. If media representatives are unable to attend, offer to send a follow-up press release along with pictures from the event immediately after the event.
6. **Engage your community.** How will you ensure that community members attend the event? The first step is to make sure that they know about the meeting! The most effective way to publicize an event to a large number of people is to network with existing local organizations. Make a presentation to a local service club (e.g., Kiwanis, Optimists, Elks, or Lions.) Talk to a faculty or staff person at your local college or university, and ask them to let their students know about the meeting (the Community Engagement Office is a great place to start!) Talk to representatives from faith-based organizations, and ask them to inform their members about the meeting. Put fliers up around town: in the coffee shop, dry cleaner's, library, town hall, and grocery store. Ask your community newspaper to post a meeting notice. Make sure that you reach out to diverse groups in order to encourage diversity of perspective at the meeting. The more attendees you have, the better!
7. **Hold your town hall meeting.** Once you have planned the meeting, lined up your speakers, engaged the media, and invited community members to participate, you are ready to hold a successful town hall meeting.



HOW TO PLAN A TOWN HALL MEETING (cont.)

- 8. Follow up with your supporters.** After you held a successful town hall meeting, make sure that you develop an action plan regarding next steps for supporters. Will you develop an ad hoc task force to follow up on the town hall's recommendations? Are there roles that the speakers may play in leading the task force? How will you engage public officials? Send thank you letters to key participants and contacts. This will help you continue to develop positive relationships with key players on this issue.
- 9. Develop a plan for your next community activity.** Keep the issue of children's safety at the forefront of community members' minds. Remember, almost 2,200 children are reported missing each day. Your work to bring attention to the issues surrounding missing and exploited children is key in helping all children have the opportunity to grow up safely.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2005-MC-CX-K024 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® and 1-800-THE-LOST® are registered service marks of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.